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FEBRUARY 2020

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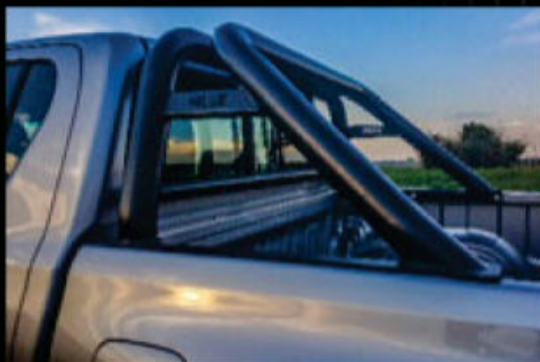
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A few weeks ago I was parked off on a large 10-metre square raft being dragged very, very slowly across the 8km stretch of sea that separates the ghost town on the Isle dos Tigres and the dunes of Angola's portion of the Namib Desert. The two 50hp outboards on the rubber duck were struggling to make headway against the weight of the raft, fully loaded with a brand-new Namib Edition 79 Series double cab. Precious cargo.

This was a high point of an incredible action-packed few days in which we explored south-western Angola in new Land Cruisers, drove the Doodsakker twice in a single day, and even got to experience the Serra da Leba Pass near Lubango. But the best thing about that boat ride, which took the most part of three hours, was the chance to slow down, take in the silence, and contemplate the marvels of Angola. This country is definitely on the up and up on the tourist front. Read the story from page 48. Make plans to travel there to experience even a portion of what it has to offer overlanders as a destination.

Coming up from the Namibian side of the Namib Desert is the second part of a story from Simon and Desiree Steadman, which relates some of what the Kaokoland has to offer. Their Ultimate Adventures tours (from page 38) are a great way to tackle, in safety, some of those bucket list places – and still have a sociable time of it.

This month, our new journalist Jacques Viljoen travels to Mpumalanga, following the lesser-known option of going to Songimvelo Nature Reserve and the Barberton area. He drives two mild 4x4 trails on this trip, pointing out that there's a lot to do in this hilly region, whether you are a history or a nature enthusiast. If you're based in Gauteng, this is an ideal long-weekend excursion. From page 24.

Apart from travel and a fun take on an old Jeep/Land Rover controversy, which was played out recently at Honingklip in the Cape (see page 66), this issue is

packed with technical stuff too. First up, reader Rob Thompson tests out his new solar set-up in Botswana (from page 54). We also get to fit a set of Tough Dog air helper springs to our Isuzu D-Max long-term, tackle some dos and don'ts when it comes to kinetic straps and tow ropes in our Recovery Series, and Andrew Middleton gives some advice about running-in a new engine in the Trail Savvy column. It's worth knowing that your new whip should be treated with care for the first 10 000km at least, and there are a few good reasons why...

Angus Boswell



Slowly does it. A long boat ride across the former Baia dos Tigres in Angola's Namibe Province.

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Ironman 4x4 gear (Submit a letter for our Forum pages)

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WIN!

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ACTION-PACKED COUNT

Wow, wow, wow. I can't think of a better way to explain our game count experience in Hwange Game Park, in October.

It started in May when I received an invitation from WEZ (Wildlife and Environment Zimbabwe) to assist with their 50th annual game census in Hwange, something we had always wanted to experience.

I immediately phoned our long-time travelling partners Johan and Ronel, they said they were in and ready to start planning for the October event. We had been to Mana Pools and Gonarezhou in 2018, and Hwange had always been on our bucket list.

The afternoon before the game count, we were all sitting around waiting to

hear which waterhole we had been allocated. Listening to other people's stories of previous counts, we could only hope that we got an exciting waterhole to watch over. At last, we were given Manzibomva, and some said it was a nice and busy one.

Off we went on the hour-and-a-half journey to Manzibomva, enjoying the scenery on the way. As I was the first to enter the waterhole area through the Mopane bush, my excitement ebbed away when I saw the waterhole was dry. Then I spotted the man-made waterhole nearby, and my excitement peaked again as my wife pointed out an elephant bull walking away through the bushes.

I called Johan on the radio to give him the update and,

while on the radio, I turned and looked towards the other side of the waterhole and could not hold my excitement when I saw a young male and female lion getting up and slowly walking away into the bush.

We parked our vehicles facing the waterhole and were getting ready to start our count at 12:00 on the dot, just as a herd of ellies arrived.

The counting started, we were busy counting elephants and more elephants, and waited. Then more elephants, a wait, and then came another herd, then some kudu, some buffalo and zebra. But the lions were nowhere to be seen.

Then another herd of ellies arrived, with two very small babies in tow. Everyone was ooh-ing and aah-ing over

the babies. But then both the calves got stuck in the mud. Chaos erupted as the adults were trumpeting and running around pushing and shoving each other, while a couple of mothers tried to get the two babies out of the mud.

This played out in front of us, they were busy for more than 30 minutes trying to get the two calves unstuck. At one stage it looked as if the one baby had given up living. If this was not nerve-wracking enough, the lioness emerged from the cover of the Mopane and went to lie on the edge of the mudhole, a mere four metres from where this struggle was going on.

Emotions were running high about what was sure to happen before our very eyes. Fortunately, it never happened. The two babies



Write in & WIN!

Sensible packing, when camping, means fitting more useful items into less space. It's the spirit of this month's prize from Ironman 4x4 – a set of collapsible food-grade silicone camping utensils worth a total of R1 600. The kit, which goes to this month's winning letter writer Thinus Kruger, includes a round bucket, a square tub, an ice tray, and a kettle with a sturdy stainless steel base.



were saved and protected by the group. It was such a relief to see the babies live to see another day, and the lioness just had to wait for the next item on the menu to arrive.

At 19:00 three buffalos appeared out of the veld to drink, and the lion came out to have a look. The hunt was on! One buffalo ran past and got cornered by the lion behind us. You could hear the roaring and groaning but could not see much because it was already dark. The commotion continued for about 10 minutes, and then all went quiet. We expected to hear the sounds of eating, but there was nothing.

As the rest of the night went on, we watched herds of elephant coming and going, and some lonely bulls were entertained by a couple of hyenas. While on the graveyard shift there was some excitement again as a

leopard appeared to come and quench its thirst.

Sunrise came and we were fired up again by the sun's rays and yet another cup of coffee. I think that must have been cup number eight, but who is counting?

Just after 07:00 a couple of kudu cows arrived from the east and directly opposite us, in a game path, was a kudu bull standing by. The female was later joined by some zebra but they seemed to be very wary and kept their distance.

My wife commented that the lions must still be nearby. I said to her that I thought they were probably sleeping somewhere with full stomachs.

My words were not yet cold when the kudu bull took off towards us and, as it reached the open area around the waterhole, the lioness appeared behind it ...

and the chase was on. The bull ran to the other side of the waterhole and got caught just as it tried to escape into the Mopane again.

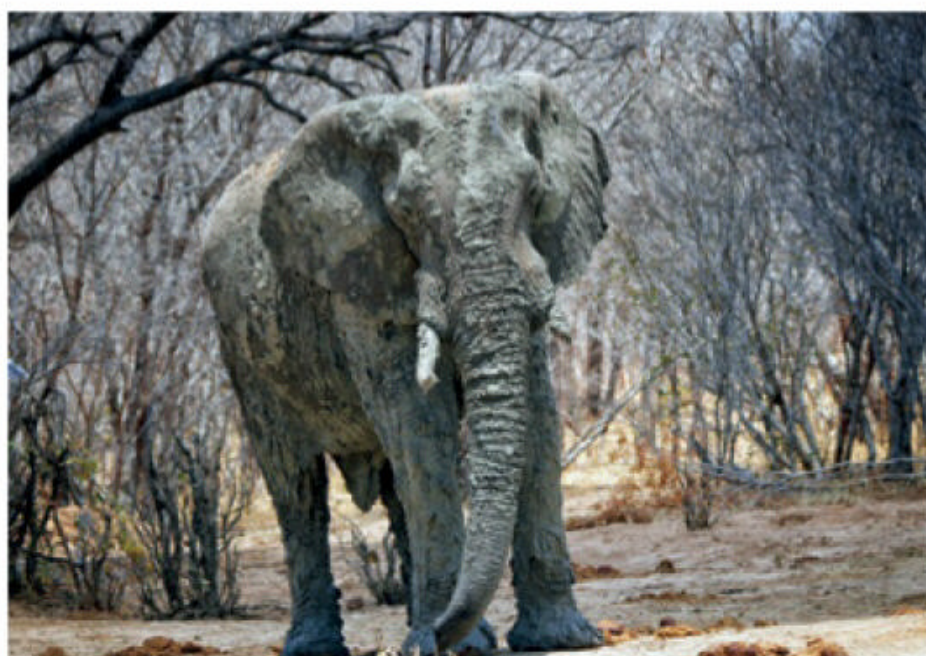
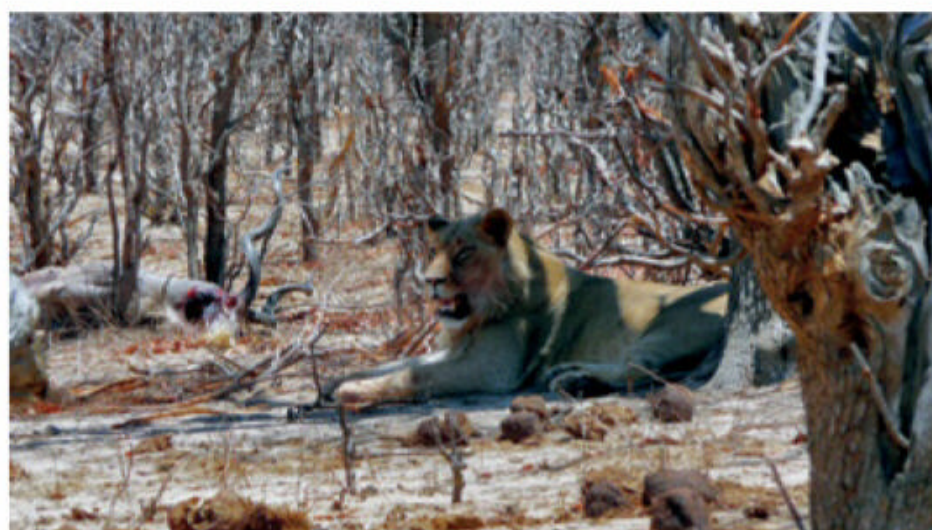
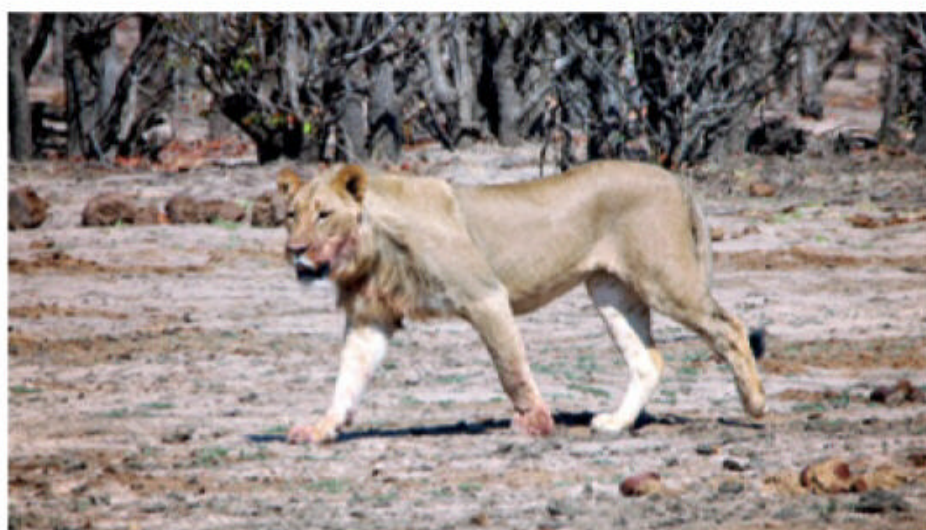
Now, what more can you ask for in 24 hours around a waterhole? Two kills in front of our eyes, and four of the Big Five a mere 40 metres away from us. Life can't get better than that!

The young lion male also appeared on the scene, after about 15 minutes the kudu got up for the last time on its front legs and then, finally, went down.

I then realised, the buffalo that was caught in the night must have gotten away. Looking at how long it took the two young lions to finish off the kudu, I am sure they lacked the skill to take down the buffalo.

For us, this was the most memorable 24 hours in our lives, all thanks to the WEZ 50th Anniversary.

**Thinus & Marne
Kruger, Johan & Ronel
Gillespie, & Johan Nel**



BAKKIE OVERSIGHTS

Having purchased three vehicles from Nissan George (NP 200 new, Nissan X-Trail, now Nissan Navara) it would be good to note that I have had the very best of personal service from the dealership in George. A special thanks to all of the staff.

As I am rather paranoid (being a previous quality manager) when it comes to looking after my vehicles, I always carry out a detailed inspection when I have the vehicle in my possession, especially when the purchase is second-hand.

After I purchased this Navara I did have an electrical problem just as I commenced leaving home with my caravan, bound for Karoo National Park. I unhitched the caravan, as the Navara had no power at all and I immediately went to the dealer. After a computer check, it was determined that it was an electrical fault on the tow-hitch socket of the car itself. It was later found out that the wiring, socket, and connectors were clogged with mud and dust. The previous owner obviously drove frequently on gravel/dirt roads. A temporary job was done so I could proceed on holiday.

I, therefore, have the following suggestions, which I believe may relate to all makes of off-road bakkies:

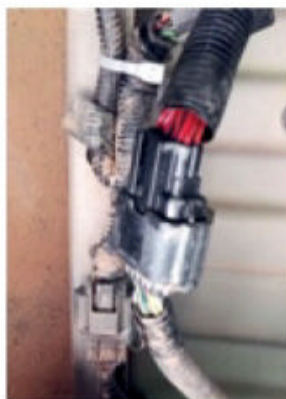
- The quality of all the wiring is questionable, as to quality components and fitment criteria. The 'sprag' covering the wiring is split and closed with tape in places – this allows the ingress of dust/mud and may contribute to faulty wiring. The joiner blocks/sockets are inferior in quality, resulting in an electrical fault due to ingress of dust/water, which can cause an ECU fault code and make the vehicle not driveable. Given that this is an off-road vehicle, more attention must be given to having quality components in the manufacturing phase.
- One solution I have when attending to this fault is to use 'shrink-on' over the wiring, a solution used extensively in the electrical industry (see the pic where I used this on the caravan/trailer electrical socket).
- The electrical joiner sockets are also subject to ingress of water/dust.
- The ingress of dust into the load body is another problem. I have had to modify the tail-gate enclosure of all these Nissan bakkie products. (This dust ingress problem is common to

all bakkies, which must function as workhorses. The gap is there to allow water to escape and to enable dirt to be sluiced out of the load bed, in my understanding. – Ed). My NP 200 had to be modified as I fitted a secure-lid and needed a completely dust-free compartment. Why is the same process for manufacturing and fitment of the doors not the same? The ideal would be to manufacture a tight-fitting tailgate with rubber seals to eliminate this problem.

Given that all of these off-road 2x4s or 4x4s are a popular purchase over R500k, it is reasonable to expect manufacturers to pay closer attention to aspects of product and manufacture.

Anthony Stokes

We would like to elicit comment from manufacturers or informed engineers on the reasons for the less-than-ideal connectors used for tow hitches, and for the large gaps in load-bodies which invariably need to be plugged in some way, in a lifestyle application. – Ed



Burst cover allows in dust and dirt.

Exposed wires on connector. Should be better specified.

Shrink tubing solves the problem.

Wires to the tow hitch properly sealed and sorted.

Dust sealing technique on the tailgate.

OVERLANDER'S CODE

In response to a growing number of complaints about how we conduct ourselves in the wilderness, we decided to draw up and promote a code of conduct for overlanders. We'd like to include your input, comments and debate, so please send your suggestions to editor@sa4x4.co.za.

FIREWOOD

Take your firewood in with you; don't chop down trees or gather dead wood within parks or wilderness areas.

KEEP QUIET We go to the bush to appreciate the sights and sounds of the bush. No music, and nothing louder than a spoken conversation.

RESPECT LOCALS – LAWS AND PEOPLE

Obey the rules of the place you're travelling through. Respect locals and their traditions; if they don't like having their photos taken, don't take photos.

SUPPORT LOCAL TRADE

Your spending money at the local shops and lodges will make them see you in a different light.

FIRES Never leave your fire unattended; do cover burnt coals, and leave no trace of your bush camp.

ENGAGE LOW-RANGE 4WD

There's nothing bok about tackling an obstacle in 2WD; you're likely to damage the terrain. Engage 4H on gravel roads – it helps to reduce corrugations.

LITTER OUT

Don't leave any litter behind (including cigarette butts). Pick up any litter you come across. Dispose of litter outside the park or wilderness area.

MAKE NO NEW TRACKS

Perhaps one of the most important ones from an environmental perspective.

POO BURIED

TOILET PAPER BURNED

GENERATORS

Switch off your generator before sunset; or, better yet, don't start it in the first place. Rather use solar power.

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS – BIRDS INCLUDED

DEFLATE YOUR TYRES Softer tyres not only improve your 4x4's off-road abilities, but enhance ride comfort and decrease the impact on the environment.

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UNDER (WHAT) PRESSURE?

I am writing this open letter to members of the tyre industry. In the past, at my previous company (Twiga Travel Cars, and, after I sold that, African Overland Campers) we produced the big stuff: Mercedes Actros, Atego, Scania, Volvo, Unimog, etc. These were all 4x4, 6x6, and even 8x8.

The tyre load/pressure ratio for these big rigs could always be found on the Internet. But when it comes to the smaller vehicles (Toyota Hiace, Hilux, Mercedes G, Sprinter, etc.) there is a lack of information on the correct load/pressure ratio.

The question is how to determine the tyre pressure of a heavily-loaded overland rig. This question has kept

me busy for quite some time.

When a new 4x4 leaves the factory, the instruction manual gives a proposal for loaded and unloaded pressures for the standard tyres. But what if one starts upgrading to non-standard tyres and one drives constantly fully-loaded (or even worse, overloaded)?

Being in the business of building large overland trucks, this problem is unknown because all tyre manufacturers (Michelin, Goodyear, etc.) supply the required data. Mostly, this comes in the shape of a graph, which can be found on the Internet, with the load per tyre/axle on the X-axis and the corresponding pressure on the Y-axis. If the load per tyre/axle does not fit the

graph, the tyre is too heavy or too light for the vehicle.

But now, when it comes to South African tyre producers and importers, the one tyre fitter says this, and the other says that. Yet knowing the correct pressure regarding safety, mileage, and comfort is essential information.

Even the smallest electrical appliances come with a booklet (in numerous languages) on safety and how to use the device. Why not for tyres?

As overlanders, after upgrading our rig it is not that difficult to determine the load on each tyre, as a weighbridge is easily found. The method is simple: measure the total weight on the front and the rear axles. For more detail, one can separately measure left and right, front and back.

My request to the industry is simple. Why not supply your customer with the information required to use the product according to your production specs? It does not matter how – a label, a booklet, the Internet. Just don't keep this vital information to yourself.

Hein Vandelaarschot

Hein, we hope to get more opinions on this following the footprint and deflation comparison in this issue of the magazine. Tyre manufacturers invariably refer back to the Original Equipment tyre choice, but, as you correctly point out, overlanders and those consistently carrying heavy loads have different requirements from their tyres. – Ed

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Anton Willemse shows us his way of packing away a Tentco Junior Bow.

Comments

Ricky Jacoby

Check this out.

Chantel Smith

See it can be done, one man.

Boipelo Seleke

Finally.

Bryan Milne

Same technique works well on the Senior Bow and will probably work on most square-based bow tents.

Kagiso McMenamin

Selfde as wat oompie jou gewys het met die grote.



Last week we got to check out Motorhome World's Dreamcatcher. It's based on the Iveco Eurocargo and has almost every feature you can imagine, even a dishwasher. Where would you travel to in this 4x4 beast?

Comments

Mike Spies Looks like a beast. Reminds me of my 4x4 Mercedes-Benz Axor bus. It took us to Lekhubu Island in Botswana last month.

Changu Gopalang

I would go to the Kgalagadi Transfontier National Park.

Karabo Mokonopi

First on my mind, the CKGR! And everywhere!

Gerhard Ebersohn

I think the question should be, "where would you NOT go?"

Jason Van Everywhere!

Viviane Hermans Africa.

Proudly South African! Rock Solid Industries (RSI) brings home the 2020 SEMA Award for Best New Van/Pick-up/Sport-Utility Product with their new SmartCap EVO, the world's first stainless steel 5-piece modular canopy system.

Comments

Gerrit A Naudé Well done.

Gerhardt Visser With those awards, they will double in price to rather aim for the international market. So us South Africans won't be able to afford it any more. That will price them out of the South African market, opening a gap for other manufacturers. Check what happened to Conqueror Trailers.

Dirk Gunter Awesome, well done. I'm very happy with my Smart Canopy Evo.



GOT SOMETHING TO SHARE?

Tell us about your travel experiences, comment on our stories, raise a debate about something that ticks you off, and tell us about your DIY projects. It is your Forum, whether in print, on our website or on Facebook. Send an email to editor@sa4x4.co.za, post on our website www.sa4x4.co.za, or comment on [Facebook.com/SA4x4magazine](https://www.facebook.com/SA4x4magazine), and stand to win a monthly prize sponsored by Ironman 4x4.





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The Large-spotted genet is distinguished by the black at the end of its tail, and by distinctive white smudges beneath its eyes. By contrast, the Small-spotted genet's tail tip is white, and the distinct black and white spots become stripes towards the tail.

The sugar-kick carnivores

Despite a high diversity of small carnivores in Africa, little is known about their ecology and their role as primary and secondary consumers. This is partly due to our general focus on what I like to call the ‘hairies and scaries’ – those large and charismatic animals that possess features such as tusks, horns, or very large teeth! We often overlook the smaller, and often nocturnal, predators which also play a crucial role in ecosystem functioning.

In this article, I would like to focus on one group of these small carnivores, in particular, the genets. Members of the genus *Genetta* (Cuvier, 1816), genets are small, spotted carnivores with wide faces and bushy tails belonging

to the family Viverridae. Within southern Africa, there are three species: the South African Large-spotted genet (*Genetta tigrina*) – which occurs south of 32°S, the Central African Large-spotted genet (*Genetta maculata*), and the Small-spotted genet (*Genetta genetta*). There is very little obvious difference between them in the field, so the easiest way to tell them apart is by taking a look at the tip of their tail. This is black in the Large-spotted genet species and white in the Small-spotted genet.

The civets and genets belong to one of the four families of terrestrial cat-like mammals descended from the Viverrines, which were civet/genet-like mammals. These four families [*Felidae* (cats), *Hyaenidae* (hyaenas),

Herpestidae (mongooses), and *Viverridae* (civets & genets)] are linked by the presence of an ossified segment in the auditory bulla – a hollow bony section of the inner ear; a feature not found in dog-like carnivorans. They are thought to have evolved more slowly than

they are closely related. There are, however, many parallels between the vocal repertoire of genets and cats; both purr, ‘meow’, hiss, and ‘spit’ in similar situations. They also make ‘churring’ and ‘yapping’ noises in stressful situations. In total, they have been shown to utilise seven specific

“The remaining puzzle is what makes Protea flowers so attractive to all these different mammals, from rodents to elephant shrews, genets, and mongooses”

any other Carnivorans and to show the most primitive skeletal features of the Order Carnivora. For example, they have a longer jaw and a greater number of upper molars than Felids, to whom

vocalisations in varying circumstances.

All species are adapted to a semi-arboreal lifestyle and, like the Civet (*Civetticus civetta*), use anal glands for marking their territories.

Genets' anal gland secretion has a musky smell, which maintains its scent for up to nine weeks. Not advisable to mistakenly get on your person, even if you do like Eau de musk parfum!

Their role in healthy ecosystem maintenance is an important one, as a considerable part of their diet consists of rodents and other small mammals. During a recent mouse infestation in Zululand, it was amazing to see the skill and dexterity with which genets dispatched them – a far more effective (and dare I say, eco-friendly) measure than any Pest Control service. They also consume large quantities of insects and fruits, the latter making them effective vectors of seed dispersal.

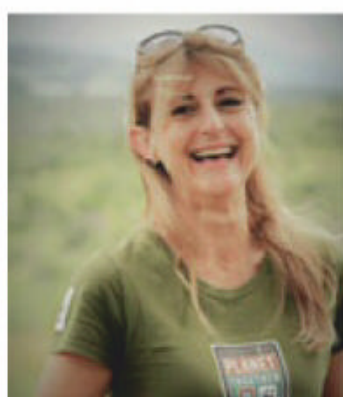
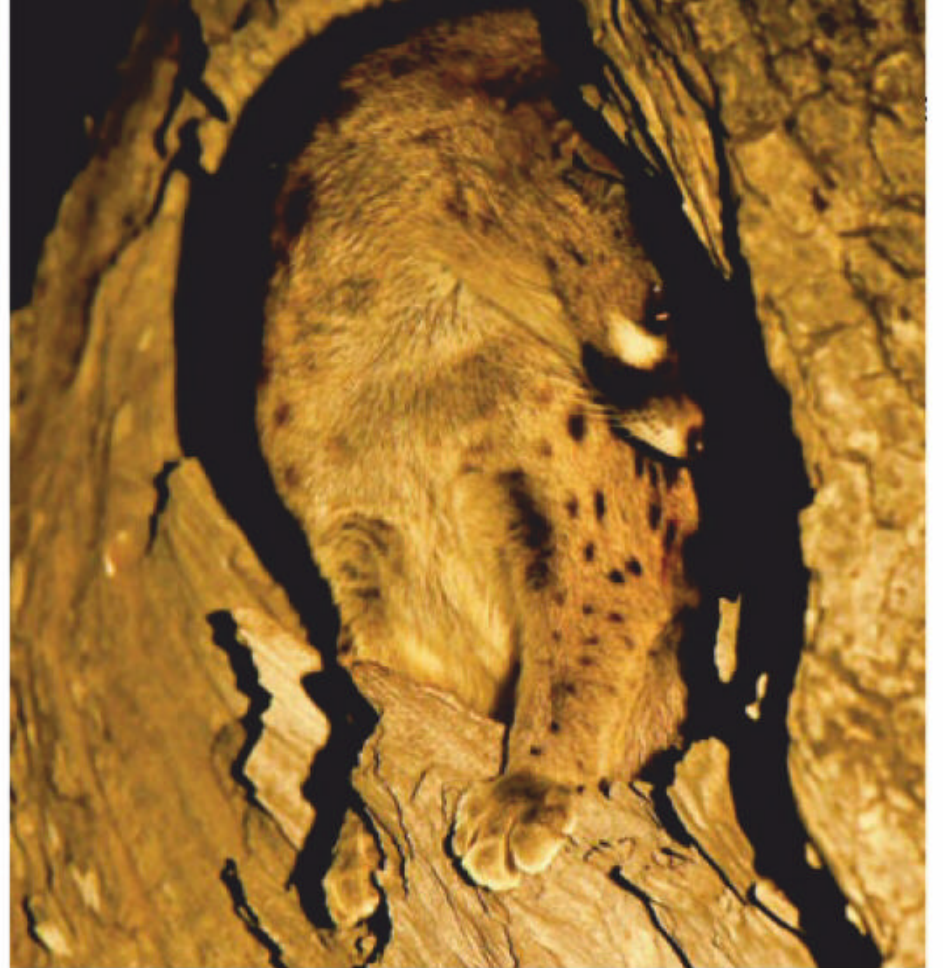
Recent research conducted in the Western Cape by Dr Sandy-Lynn Steenhuisen from the University of Cape Town (UCT) focused on monitoring the interaction of mammals with Protea flowers. Her team recorded around 30 species of Protea being pollinated by small, ground-dwelling mammals, such as rodents and elephant shrews, alongside birds. “But the large-spotted genets... were something of a surprise. They accounted for around 7% of all recorded visits to the flowers by mammals and birds... and appeared quite keen on the nectar, visiting flowers repeatedly,” said Steenhuisen.

The large-spotted genets dove right into the blooms, which produce up to 2ml of nectar containing over 30% sugar by weight. Pollen seen on their snouts after they drank supports the theory that they play a larger role in pollinating the plants than previously thought. Genets are mainly meat and arthropod eaters but Steenhuisen thinks they visit flowers for “the sugar kick”.

The remaining puzzle is what makes Protea flowers so attractive to all these different mammals – rodents, elephant shrews, genets, mongooses – with diets ranging from seeds to insects and meat.

“These unrelated animals have different diets, so it’s a puzzle as to what kind of common attractive signal is being emitted by these plants,” says Steenhuisen. “One possibility may be the fact that the flowers emit a fermented odour similar to that of sour milk or cheese, which would likely be more enticing to carnivores than a sweet, sugary smell.”

A 2012 study at the University of Zurich found that most meat-eating animals can’t taste sugars, bearing mutated forms of the genes responsible for a sweet tooth. In short, whatever the reason, “they like their meat, genets... do, but they also like to wash it down with a slug of flower nectar every now and then!” (Karl Gruber) ●



Lorraine Doyle

is the owner of Africa Nature Training. She writes about bush lore and the many wonders of the African Bushveld.

www.AfricaNatureTraining.co.za

An advertisement for the Suzuki Grand Vitara. The top half shows a silver SUV parked on a dirt road in a hilly, arid landscape. Below the image, the text "GRAND VITARA" is written in large, bold, white letters. Underneath that, it says "DRIVE THE LEGEND". To the left of this text are two icons: a "5 YR" warranty icon and a "Touchscreen with Reverse Camera*" icon. Below these icons, it says "Five-Year/ 200 000km Warranty" and "While stocks last." At the bottom, there are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn, followed by the website "SuzukiAuto.co.za". On the far right, there is a Suzuki logo and the slogan "Way of Life".

TRAIL SAVVY: Off-road driving tips, skills & practices

Breaking in an engine: gently does it...

When you've just purchased your new pride and joy, the first thought after unwrapping the ribbon in the dealership could well be along the lines of, "What's the best way to run-in the engine and transmission to ensure optimum performance and the longest possible service life?"

Older mechanics will probably give detailed schedules of maximum rpm and periods of cooling off for both a new and rebuilt engine. Some of what they say might be true, but this remains a contentious topic with many opinions and no single 'right way' to do it. Manufacturers these days make things simple and usually provide a few guidelines – these should be the first thing to check in the User's Manual.

Put simply, the break-in period is the time a new or rebuilt engine takes for its various bearings, cylinders, ring surfaces, clutches, gears, and other mechanical components to conform to

each other's shape through gradual wear. Despite huge strides in manufacturing accuracy and quality of componentry, microscopic imperfections between binding surfaces still occur. For this reason, any new engine needs to go through a running-in period despite the fact that all engines are started and tested at the factory.

Cam lobes, bearings, push rods, and the various gears within an engine will bed in on their own accord; the part you need to worry about is the piston, its rings, and the cylinder itself. How you break in these components will affect performance, efficiency, reliability, and oil consumption throughout the life of the vehicle.

The first 1 000km of your engine's life is no doubt the most crucial to its longevity. Small amounts of load must be applied to the engine from cold. Warm it up gradually on the road (and under light and varying load) without idling for too long. As temperatures increase, more load can be applied,



Ford's high-tech 2.0-litre diesel. As with all new engines, it's been started and run in the factory, but you should still take it easy for the first few thousand kilometres.

gradually increasing load to full torque over time as you reach the 1 000km mark.

Since a piston ring is not 'square' but instead more of a tapered design, pressure from the combustion chamber forces the ring outwards against the cylinder wall. If load is NOT applied properly during the break-in process the ring and cylinder wall will not wear-in properly against each other, possibly causing glazing of the bore or piston, damage to the cross-hatch patterning on the cylinder bore, and eventual blow-by. These effects will cause your engine to run poorly.

That 'crosshatch' pattern is applied to cylinder walls during the manufacturing

process to help retain oil against the cylinder walls, where it sits in the microscopic valleys of the patterning, helping retain lubrication and, initially, helping the piston rings seal effectively.

If there is a poor seal between the piston rings and cylinder walls, hot gasses may blow by the piston rings and flash-bake the oil on the cylinder, creating a hard deposit layer known as glazing. This will cause high oil and fuel consumption and may cause your vehicle to smoke.

To avoid this problem, specially-designed break-in oils are often specified by manufacturers. They are typically replaced with



The cross-hatching on cylinder bores ensures proper lubrication. Damage due to an overzealous run-in can affect engine life and performance.

DOS & DON'TS OF RUNNING-IN

- **Do not** – Idle the engine for extended periods during the first few hours of operation as it can cause 'glazing' of the cylinder walls, preventing a good seal between it and the piston rings.
- **Do not** – Over-rev or run the engine at more than 70-80% of power capacity for the first 1 000km as this could cause premature wear. Instead, keep the engine at its peak torque RPM, and NOT the invariably much higher peak power RPM.
- **Do not** – Labour the engine by using large throttle openings at very low revs. This puts immense pressure on the crankshaft and causes intense vibrations, which may reduce the life of crank bearings.
- **Do** – Operate the vehicle at peak torque RPMs but not full throttle. The pressure and heat at working RPMs will prevent cylinder glazing and help the rings seat properly into their ring lands.
- **Do** – Despite what many people believe, Ravenol recommends warming up your engine from cold by immediately applying a small load, helping it to warm up faster than it would at idle and preventing cylinder glazing.
- **Do** – After 15 hours of moderate load, you can operate the engine at full capacity but avoid long periods of idling or high revs, always making sure both the coolant and oil is up to temperature before using full throttle.
- **Do** – Adhere to your manufacturer's recommended service intervals. Do not miss the vital first service. Change oil more frequently if in doubt and using your vehicle in harsh and/or dusty conditions.

normal specification oils after the first service. In other words, don't ignore that first service. Interestingly, mineral-based break-in oils are intentionally designed to have a higher friction-coefficient than the oil your manufacturer recommends using for the life of your vehicle. The higher levels of friction help a new engine bed in faster than it otherwise would with normal oil, making the process much shorter and ultimately extending the life of your engine.

Break-in oils like the Ravenol Break-In SAE20-50 are mineral-based oils with specific additives such as zinc, which help components wear evenly and seat properly when new. After the first service, it's completely normal to find a small amount of iron filings in the oil filter or magnetic sump plug. These filings should stop appearing after the break-in process, and, if they persist, you may have scored the cylinder linings, damaged your rings, or scored your cam lobes due to incorrect procedure or an engine fault.

As the pistons and rings move past the cylinder wall at great speed under high pressure, a perfect seal is vital to prevent the escape of gasses like unburned fuel blowing past the rings to the crank case, or oil gasses from the crank case reaching the combustion chamber; this is known as 'blow-by'.



Piston rings are not quite square. Compression pushes them outwards, helping them seat exactly to the cylinder bore.

A diesel engine can take as much as 150 hours to properly break in and you may notice significantly improved fuel consumption, refinement, performance, and general 'feel' of your engine after an effective break-in.

We canvassed a few experts on their opinion. Freddi Stafford from Ravenol recommends not idling an engine to warm it up while it's running in; instead, he advises that driving slowly for the first few kilometres to warm up engines, transmission, and other driveline components is a better option. In fact, this should be standard procedure throughout the life of a vehicle.

Andrew Kofahl, from Cape town-based diesel

injection specialists JEG Diesel, recommends changing your oil after the first 1 000km and not using full throttle and full revs until your vehicle has passed 10 000km. "City driving is good for a new engine due to low loads and a varying RPM range," he advises.

The basic consensus? For the first few thousand kilometres, it's a good idea to avoid sustained RPM such as occurs with long-distance highway driving or idling for sustained periods. Conversely, overloading your engine or subjecting it to extremely high RPMs from new can also cause damage to the rings, so a cautious approach is always recommended. •

Andrew Middleton is obsessed with anything wheeled, and has been in and around 4x4s since before he could talk.

He lived out of a Land Rover in Central America for eight months, and has been stuck – usually not for long – in every sort of terrain from the Okavango Delta to the Namib Desert. andrew@sa4x4.co.za



Preparing for a kinetic recovery, with one vehicle stuck deep in sand. Stand clear!

PART 5: Kinetic and tow straps

It's time to talk straps, a key element when it comes to vehicle-to-vehicle recoveries.

It is so easy to fall into the trap of buying the wrong equipment when it comes to recovery, especially recovery straps.

Straps need to be tested and rated for the task at hand. Forget about the tow straps that you get at auto shops or the local supermarket chain. There is no way you can verify that the straps have met stringent manufacturing requirements, nor typically do they carry genuine certification.

Please buy the correct straps from reputable manufacturers. This is the only way to avoid putting yourself and your passengers and others at risk.

YouTube is full of videos showing things that can go wrong during recoveries because of using the wrong

equipment and the wrong application. Don't become a statistic. Recoveries have the potential to be dangerous.

Before buying a kinetic strap, for example, it is important to take note of a few vital facts:

- *How much does your vehicle weigh?*
- *Do you have properly-rated recovery points on your vehicle?*
- *Have you received training in the use of it in a safe way?*

Bear in mind that when your vehicle is really stuck (as in stuck up to its chassis and not moving), then it no longer weighs the 2.8 or 2.9 tons that is your GVM (Gross Vehicle Mass) as stated on your license disc. Your vehicle now weighs THREE times as much. So 2.8 times three gives you a realistic 'dead weight' of the vehicle – a rather different 8.4 to 8.7 tons.

Given that the average kinetic strap is only rated at 8 000kg you can see the potential problem that you are going to have. In this case, you are going to have to get a 10 000kg kinetic strap. A general rule of thumb is that you should build in a safety margin of 4:1. In other words, always buy a strap rated to recover FOUR times the GVM of your vehicle. Bottom line, it is vital that you speak to sales staff BEFORE buying your gear so that they can help you make an informed purchase.

All too often people are oblivious as to how much their vehicle actually weighs after fitting all the accessories. Often this laden mass exceeds the legal limits, never mind the safety limits. Go to a weighbridge and find out your typical loaded weight, and then make a decision about what the rating of your recovery straps should be.

Kinetic straps

In almost all cases when recovery failures occur with kinetic straps, there are two areas to blame: first, a failure of the actual kinetic strap, and second, a failure of the recovery point.

Be absolutely sure your recovery points are up to the task. All too often, people (particularly those with SUV-type vehicles) are using transport tie-down points as recovery points. This is asking for trouble.

Also, please forget about using a weighted winch blanket to try and weigh the kinetic strap down in case it snaps. You are fooling yourself and are going to get hurt.

The best and safest way is to make use of a safety harness that is attached to both the strap and the vehicle to safeguard you in the event of failure. Be sure this item is included in your kit bag and ensure it is connected every time you use a strap for a recovery. Once again, it should be rated and from a reputable manufacturer.

Tow straps

Tow straps come in different lengths (either 5m or 10m) and breaking strengths. Use them only for what they are made – towing. DO NOT attempt to use them in a snatch recovery! They are designed to be used for slow, steady pulls only.

A 5m tow strap can, in an emergency, be used as an A-frame or bridle, but, once again, make double sure of the rating; it should at minimum be 10 000kg.

On the other side of the coin, NEVER use a kinetic strap to tow with. You will destroy it.

Care & maintenance

Tow straps and winch straps are typically made of low-elongation polyester. Kinetic straps are made of high-elongation nylon 66 fibre. In each case, the care and maintenance of the straps are much the same. Here are a few simple rules to follow.

- NEVER wash with soap – only, preferably, cold water with a strong pressure hose.
- NEVER dry them in the sun or leave them wrapped around your bulbar – UV rays destroy them.

The 4x4 MegaWorld recovery kit with kinetic and tow straps, plus a handy carry bag to keep things all in one place.



Below left

Bernie Williams with the good stuff. Ensure the straps you buy are certified and rated for four times your vehicle's typical fully-loaded GVM.

Below right

Hefty recovery point and proper shackle. These are a vital element in any safe kinetic recovery, and should be present when towing steadily as well.



Dry them in a ventilated area making sure they are completely dry before packing them away, or the fibre will rot.

- After EVERY use of the straps inspect them for any damage. Make sure they don't have small cuts or abrasions on them. As little as 10% damage can reduce the strap's failure point by 50%.

Stash it right

As ever, throwing a jumble of tow straps

and ropes into the back of your bakkie isn't going to do them much good. Rather get yourself a quality recovery gear bag where you can neatly store all your recovery gear. That way, you know exactly where everything is when you need it.

Finally, it's a good idea to enrol in a recovery course with a reputable institution and receive the correct training in the safe use of your recovery gear, before you head out onto a demanding trail. ●

This series on 4x4 vehicle recovery techniques and equipment is brought to you by 4x4 Mega World and written by Bernie Williams, an accredited 4x4 guide and advanced driving instructor. Each month's content will be accompanied by a short video. Find it on SA4x4's Facebook page and on our website: www.sa4x4.co.za.



HANDLE THE PRESSURE

Designed to handle the harsh conditions of off-road travel, the Ironman 4x4 Champ Pro compressor pumps out 160 litres per minute at a maximum pressure of 150psi. Featuring snap-on quick-release fittings, 8 metres of heat-resistant heavy-duty hose, and an in-line pressure gauge/deflator, the compressor is seal tested, dust resistant, and tested for performance to ensure you get out on the tracks quicker.

R3 495

info@ironman4x4.co.za

www.ironman4x4.co.za



SWINGING SHADE

Howling Moon's 270 Degree Swing Awn is a perfect choice for those who want a quick and easy setup with massive 270-degree coverage. It's free-standing in winds up to 20km/h, with a self-contained support leg available in case of heavy wind gusts. The Swing Awn is waterproof, UV-resistant, and is coated with fluorocarbon to facilitate soil release and rapid drying.

2m length with 1.9m extension **R8 295**

2.5m length with 2.5m extension **R10 840**

www.howlingmoon.com

POPPING UP

Tentco's Caprivi 3 pop-up tent erects in seconds. Measuring 2.4m x 1.8m x 1.0m and weighing 2.15kg in total, the Caprivi 3 is made of Nylon, uses fibre poles, and packs up into a flat circular carry case.

CONTACT FOR PRICE

info@tentco.co.za

www.tentco.co.za



PORTABLE PRESSURE

ARB's portable air compressor will provide fast and convenient air, ideal for inflating tyres and other equipment. For easy carrying and storage, this quality portable air compressor is constructed from lightweight, high-grade materials, and comes mounted in a durable case. It features automotive load protection in the loom, a pressure cut-out switch, a 6-metre inflation hose, and thermal overload protection.

R6 169

www.4x4megaworldonline.com



KITCHEN ON THE GO

No one likes having to pack their kitchen away when they want to travel for the day. Wild Accessories are able to add a kitchen unit to any canopy on your bakkie. Available with or without foam cut-outs. Just fold away the unit and off you go.

FROM **R1 800** (excl. VAT)

(012) 771 7940

(060) 963 4251

info@wildacc.co.za

www.wildacc.co.za

TIDY TOOLS

The Mac-Afric seven-drawer mechanic's tool cabinet is the ultimate workshop organiser. The cabinet is constructed from powder-coated steel with extra-large drawer pulls and durable EVA foam inserts for the 193 tools, each with clear identification markings. An extra-large side handle can be fitted to either side of the unit, which also features 5-inch industrial-grade wheels for effortless mobility. The contents include a comprehensive range of quality chrome vanadium hand tools.

R8 495

info@adendorff.co.za

www.adendorff.co.za



BRAIN AND BRAWN

Casio has announced the PRT-B50, the first PRO TREK outdoor watch to have Smartphone Link functionality via the Pro Trek Connected app. Along with Bluetooth®, it features new quad sensor technology. Three for compass bearing, barometric pressure/altitude, temperature, and one accelerometer for counting steps, so it offers a route log and location indicator among a range of other features. The 50.8mm wide and 15.6mm high resin case is waterproof to 10 bars, making it suitable for swimming and snorkelling, in addition to its features which appeal to hikers, climbers, and active outdoor enthusiasts. It offers a generous two-year battery life.

R5 699

www.jamesralph.com/dealers/



KEEPING AN EYE

The Air Spring Supply Company now offers pressure monitoring systems for their Airmax in-coil and leaf spring kits. Two external sensors are fitted on the manual inflation valve, with an anti-theft lock nut and a wireless system that allows you to monitor air spring pressures from inside the cabin.

R1 700 (excl. VAT)

infojhb@assc.co.za

www.assc.co.za

PRIVATE ZONE

We all love camping and the outdoors, but sometimes you just want some privacy. The Wild Dog Outdoor End-Suite works using an easy-to-assemble frame, which can be mounted on many surfaces thanks to the 3 x 8mm slotted mounting holes. The height can be adjusted with straps to fit any vehicle and the curtain is available in 400gsm PU-coated Ripstop canvas, or 210gsm Poly-Oxford material, depending on your needs. Extra support poles can be purchased for those windy days.

R3 650 (Black Ripstop)

R3 100 (Green Poly-Oxford)

info@wilddogoutdoor.co.za

www.wilddog4x4.co.za



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MERCEDES GLB

Seven-seater 'baby'

Offering up to seven seats and based on the compact B Class family, the GLB offers both front- and four-wheel-drive options, the latter with an 'off-road' mode. The GLB finalises Merc's aim to produce an SUV variant for every model in its range and should be a top seller for the brand in SA when it arrives in the second quarter of this year. Despite the 'B' designation, it's 100mm longer than its family group-set at just over 4.6 metres, with a third-row option for larger families. A typical Merc interior with quality finishes, a large touchscreen infotainment system, and plenty of driver assistance options rounds off a safe package. Exterior design elements are in line with the rest of the marque's new rounded styling and include a wide grille and massive front air intake. SA gets only two versions of Merc's baby SUV, both coupled to an eight-speed dual-clutch transmission – the GLB220d 4MATIC diesel which punches out 140kW and 400Nm, and the GLB250 petrol sibling (2WD only), which offers a more sporting 165kW and 350Nm.



JEEP ULTRA COMPACT

A Jimny rival?

A report from the UK has revealed that Jeep is set to launch a highly-capable but 'Ultra Compact' new model. Whether or not this means we will get another softy like the Renegade is yet to be seen, but the claim is that it will provide, "strong daily practicality" and "be able to be used as a bad-ass Jeep". At least, that's according to the head of brand marketing, Marco Pigozzi. It has been speculated that the model will use underpinnings from the PSA group and be offered with an all-electric powertrain.

VOLKSWAGEN TERAMONT X

Larger than life

Debuted in 2018 at the New York Auto Show, the VW Atlas Cross Sport Concept has come to life as the Teramont X. Bigger than the Touareg, the Teramont X is a massive seven-seater that goes head to head with the Audi Q7, BMW X7, and even the Bentley Bentayga, but on a different platform.

There's no word on if we will get the behemoth in SA, but China is predictably first in line with sales starting early in this quarter. Powertrain options haven't yet been released but the now transversely-mounted 3.6-litre V6 petrol was the engine on display at the latest China Auto Show.





FORD RANGER

Wins pick-up award

Built in sunny South Africa, the Ford Ranger has come top trumps at the 2020 International Pick-up Award (IPUA) at a special gala ceremony held in Lyon, France. The highly-experienced IPUA jury were won over by the Ranger's new 2.0-litre twin-turbo diesel engine and 10-speed gearbox.

“The 2.0 Single Turbo is no less impressive and delivers exceptional fuel efficiency, as evidenced when it claimed victory in the highly-competitive pick-up segment in the inaugural WesBank Fuel Economy Tour held recently,” adds the jury. The new Ranger also adds a host of new safety tech including Collision Mitigation Braking in the top Wildtrak variant, using cameras and radar to pre-empt collisions.



JAC T8 DOUBLE CAB

Pricing released

JAC has gained momentum in South Africa, with 45 dealers and a range of models on their books, with affordability the primary sales ticket.

Pricing has now been released on their flagship T8 4x4 double cab, which comes in at a competitive R399 900. Slotting in above the T6 4x4 (priced at R339 900), the T8 is powered by a 1.9-litre turbodiesel putting out 100kW/320Nm and mated to a six-speed auto transmission. Tech features include ABS, tyre pressure monitoring, reverse camera, and a seven-inch information screen. A 5-year/150 000km warranty is standard, with 10 000km service intervals.

LAND ROVER DISCOVERY

‘Value’ limited edition

The latest iteration of JLR's Discovery has been offered with 2.0-litre petrol and diesel engines in Europe since its launch. South African choices have to date been limited to V6 petrol and diesel options, until now.

Value conscious buyers will now be able to snap up one of a limited run of 50 Discos powered by 177kW 2.0-litre Ingenium diesel engines, in mid-spec SE trim, and in white or silver only.

This trim line comes standard with LED headlights, rain-sensing wipers, a 10-speaker Enhanced Sound System, Terrain Response, 12-way leather seats, and ‘InControl Touch Navigation with Apple CarPlay’, in addition to a raft of safety and comfort features. The new engine promises low consumption of just 6.4l/100km. Pricing has been set at R1 240 700 and includes a standard 5-year/100 000km warranty.





Riaan guiding
Anton down
into White
Quartz donga.

Where the sun rises

We are invited to test-drive two long-closed
4x4 trails, experience Songimvelo Nature
Reserve, and get a taste of Mpumalanga's
lesser-known natural wonders

Story **Jacques Viljoen** Photography **Jacques Viljoen & Anton Willemse**

Mpumalanga is Zulu for ‘the place where the sun rises’, and its major natural attractions have long been a favoured escape for travellers the world over looking for wildlife and dramatic scenery. But there’s a lot more for the traveller once the Kruger National Park, Blyde River Canyon, and Dullstroom have been ticked off the list.

Truth is, many of these places are a long drive from the main centres of Tshwane and Johannesburg, so there is a real need to find destinations better suited as a short weekend escape – with a bit of adventure thrown into the mix. So when the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency invited us to experience Songimvelo Nature Reserve and some of Barberton’s unique mining history, we accepted in a flash. The chance to drive two resuscitated 4x4 routes just added to the appeal.

Established in 1987, Somgimvelo is not on the primary tourist routes, yet at

48 000 hectares it is the largest in Mpumalanga, near the famously-scenic Barberton Mountainlands (which have been proposed as a World Heritage Site). It’s also strategically nestled against the north-western border of Eswatini (Swaziland), so has long been a prime candidate as a tourism node for the Songimvelo-Malolotja Transfrontier Conservation Area. The latter initiative has been slow to develop, and there have been some hitches related to poaching and a dispute over cattle in the reserve, but we are hoping these are now a thing of the past.

The game plan

So that’s the background to SA4x4’s Anton Willemse and I all packed up in a Isuzu D-Max 2.5 double cab, heading out from Johannesburg early one scorching late spring morning. We are due to meet national nature guide Gideon Stapelberg and his wife later in the day in Barberton, a 350km drive.

Below left

Situated on top of the mountain, the Barberton Bowling Club is the second oldest in the country.

Below right

We manage to find a needlepoint-sized grain of gold at Cloete Mine.

Bottom left

Not a place for claustrophobic people, the Cloete Gold Mine offers an eye-opening experience of what working conditions were like when the mine was active.

Bottom right

Exploring Cloete gold mine with our guide Nick Meintjies.



WHO TO USE

Barberton adventures is the company to contact if you want to explore the mines. They will get you access to the mines and have very knowledgeable guides. www.barbertonadventures.co.za





Above The Barberton Ecotrail is a winding tar road that snakes through the mountains with various lookout points.

Below The lookout point at 12.7km on the Barberton Ecotrail offers the best view and has the most information plaques.



There's been a hitch, of course. Before we set off, I realise I have forgotten an essential baseplate for my camera gimbal back in Cape Town, turning it into a very heavy paperweight. After some Googling, I manage to find a plate which isn't perfect but will do the job. Luckily the shop is very close to the home of our other partner-in-crime, Riaan Jooste from Complete 4x4.

After picking up Riaan and stopping at Outdoorphoto to fix my very expensive packing mistake (always make a list), we hit the highway. There's a bit of a headwind, and our 100kW D-Max is needing frequent downshifts on the hills to keep a decent pace – though with three heavy fellows on board, along with all their luggage, a warehouse worth of camera equipment and a full tank of diesel, it's to be expected.

After passing through Dullstroom and onto the R38 over Nelshoogte Pass, we roll into a toasty Barberton to meet up with Gideon and Nick Meintjies, a Barberton local. Nick is an interesting character, and he knows his local history. His first stop on the local flavour tour is the Barberton bowling club, the second oldest bowling club in the country. Situated at the top of a mine on a mountain, with views

AT A GLANCE

Dunbar 4x4 Trail

Cost:

R330 per vehicle

Start point:

25°59'56.2"S

31°03'57.2"E

Distance:

14km

Time to complete:

4 hours

Terrain:

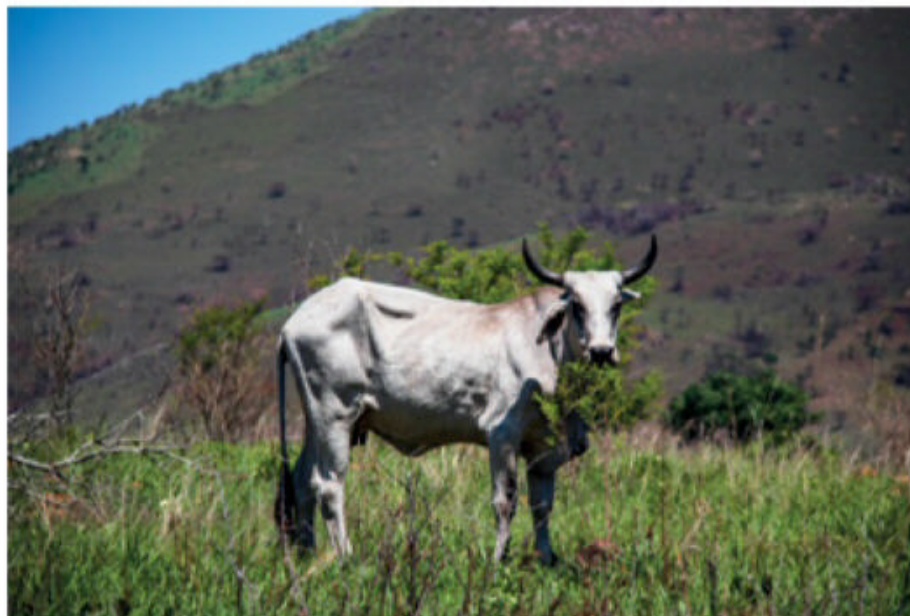
Jeep track with a few rocky sections and river crossings

Difficulty:

Grade 1 up to 2 at places

Bookings:

013 759 5300



forever in every direction, it is almost enough to make even me consider taking up bowling.

We have a quick prego roll for lunch before making our way across to Cloete mine, an old gold mine about 10km outside Barberton. Nick guides us through one of the access tunnels to give us an idea of what working conditions were like more than 100 years ago. We are fortunate enough to have phone lights and flashlights that can turn night into day, but trying to walk with a phone light in one hand, while holding a camera and gimbal which is recording video in the other hand, in a darkness like I had never experienced before, results in a few knocks and bumps. We only walk about 170 metres in and then down one of the side shafts, but because of

the absence of any light, it feels like kilometres.

On our drive up, we jokingly say, “Manne ons gaan goud kry.” True story. Nick shows us how to pan for gold, using the ancient technique in the stream that runs through the mine, and as Nick clears out the pan, we strike it lucky. Granted, it is only a speck as big as the tip of a needle, but it is gold, real gold.

Geological wonders

After experiencing our own little ‘gold rush’ we make our way out of Barberton along the R38 and then turn off to Saddleback Pass, otherwise known as the Barberton Makhonjwa Geotrail. It’s on the R40, a 27km tar road that eventually leads to the Josefdal-Bulembu border post with

Top

The Isuzu getting ready for its first swim of the day.

Above left

Time for a small water splash. The fourth river crossing at Dunbar 4x4 trail is reasonably shallow and consists of small rocks.

Above right

The local wildlife keeping an eye on their land. Wouldn’t want to mess with those horns.

**Above**

Two children, from one of the villages on the Ebutsini 4x4 trail, enjoy a refreshing swim in the river.

Left

Although the Barberton area is mostly grasslands, many species of beautiful flowers bloom during the year.

Below

The Drakensberg Mountains disappearing into the dusk-lit horizon.

Eswatini. There are 11 demarcated tourist vantage points along the road, each offering a vastly different view to the one before.

At one of these stops, Nick points out lines on the mountainside that don't look like much until he points out they have been caused by a tsunami. I can't believe it, because where we were standing is about 200 kilometres from the nearest ocean, at Maputo.

The vantage point at 12.7km is the one with the best view. It has a few information plaques explaining the origins of the various pieces of rock on what is known as Barberton's Greenstone belt, including that of pillow lava, which is formed when volcanic lava hits cold ocean water giving it a silky smooth texture unlike the jagged texture of normal lava. Some of the ancient volcanic and sedimentary rock around the Barberton area is up to 3.57 billion years old.

On our way to our accommodation in Songimvelo, we come across a very steep hill which is used by bikers and 4x4ers to get some action for the day. It isn't the most challenging section, but it's rutted and very steep in places. After throwing the Isuzu in low range, Riaan gets up with ease. This is



where we gain a whole load of respect for the D-Max 2.5.

Our drive takes us to Ekulindeni, a very small town about 54km south of Barberton which borders the eastern entrance of the Songimvelo Nature Reserve. To get to Songimvelo, follow the R40 from Barberton for 36km then turn right onto the gravel road. This road takes you straight into Ekulindeni, where you follow the signs to Songimvelo Nature Reserve.

Our lodgings are at Kromdraai campsite, which sits next to the Komati River. They offer campsites and log cabins, and when we find out that our cabins have air-con, a universal sigh of relief murmurs through the car. It has been a long and achingly-hot day. It is a pity, then, to discover the said aircons are ineffective at anything more than a 1.5-metre radius, and only work at night. It is, unfortunately, part of a general theme of neglect, along with room fans that don't work, ill-equipped kitchens, loose toilets, and very noisy locals.

Songimvelo and the Dunbar Trail

Eventually, we settle down for a braai and a few cold ones to discuss our agenda for the next day. The first challenge will be to drive the out-and-back Dunbar 4x4 trail, an Eskom service road turned trail inside Songimvelo Nature Reserve.

We are also able to garner some knowledge about the reserve and get to understand why it is a destination for many international scientists. Apart from the ancient geological wonders hidden in Makonjwa Mountain, the highest peak in the reserve, there is also a fascinating stone-walled formation dating back to 400 BC. Botanists are perhaps more interested in the 1 400 known plant species, which range from several recently-discovered species to the last wild population of the Woolly cycad. The landscape is spectacular too, and ranges from savanna plains to high grassy mountains and rolling hills, whose broken landscapes make this reserve one of the most aesthetically attractive areas in the province.

Below left

Beautiful thatch huts of a homestead within Songimvelo Nature Reserve.

Below right

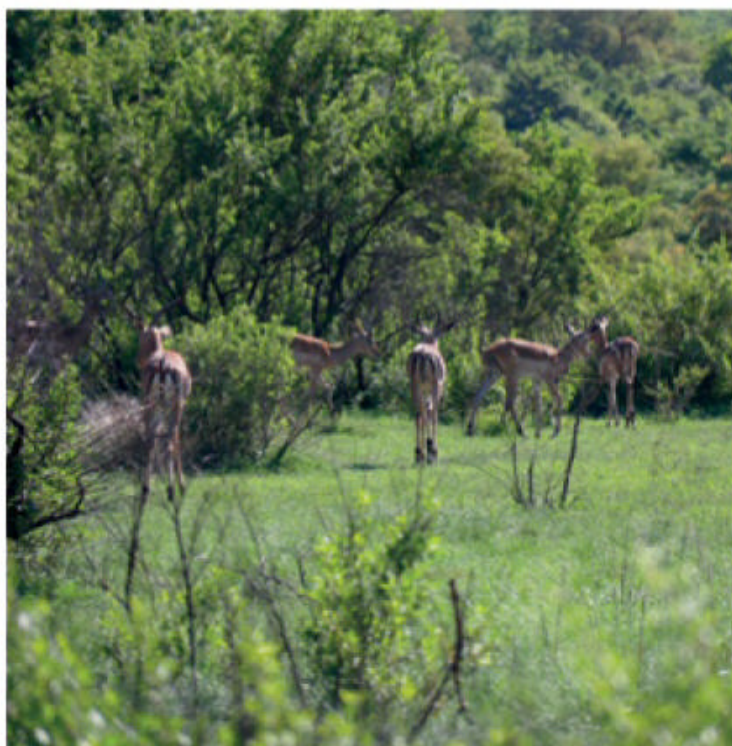
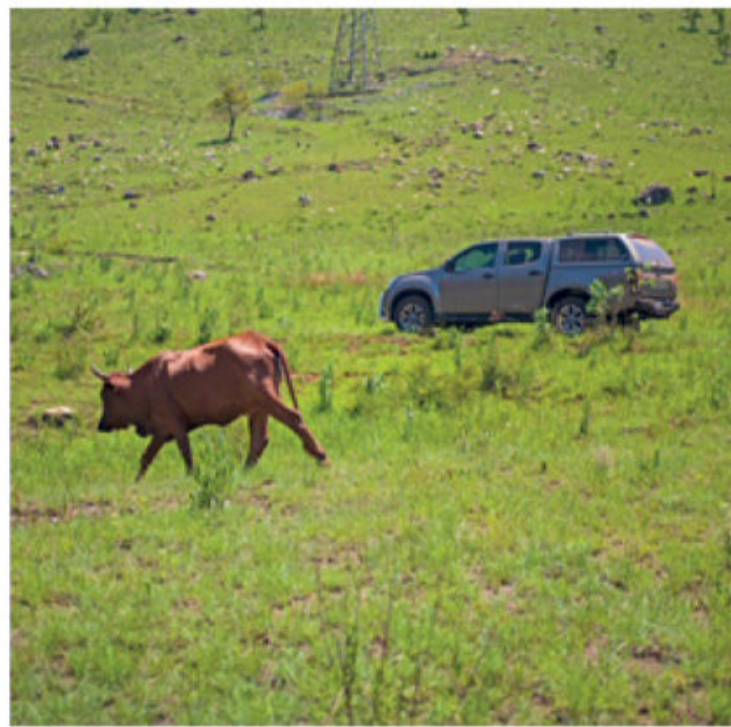
The local wildlife was not too happy with the presence of our Isuzu in their backyard.

Bottom left

Songimvelo Nature Reserve has a big variety of wildlife, including these impala.

Bottom right

Trying to find some shade on a scorching hot day.



Ebutsini 4x4 Trail has a picnic stop with a few benches, tables, and ablutions about halfway through the trail.



Left
Talking with Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency employees at Kromdraai camp provided a different perspective on tourism development in the area.

Below
The Isuzu standing ready at the entrance of Ebutsini 4x4 Trail.



We are surprised to find Songimvelo is home to four of the Big Five, with the lion being the only absentee. With its dramatic deep valleys and gorges leading into the Komati River Valley, the reserve is home to over 60 species of mammals. The reserve has, for many years, been an important breeding centre for white rhino.

After an early breakfast sarmie, we are ready to hit the Dunbar Trail, a relatively easy route, despite its seven river crossings. We discover that some 4x4 experience and low range is essential. There is one very loose incline with big rocks, so pick the wrong line or carry too much speed and you are going to leave your car there. It's at this point that Anton insists I get some seat time in a manual 4x4. At the bottom of the climb, Riaan simply says, "Put it in first in low range, release the clutch, and watch the magic happen." With a bit of trepidation, I follow his instructions. And here the Isuzu amazes all of us. With the confidence of the proverbial mountain goat, and without much driver input other than steering, it simply walks up the loose ascent. Facing a steep descent a while later, Riaan gives me the same instructions, "Just release the clutch and let her go on compression." No problem. The D-Max makes it all look like kindergarten stuff.

We have a great picnic stop next to a river at the 7km turnaround point, taking a break from

the bumping of the vehicle, while surrounded by the incredible green mountains that mark this area. After some 3.5 hours of ups and downs, we end back at the departure point.

An abandoned town

Our next stop is a ghost town, reached off the twisting Diepgezet Pass, winding down through indigenous forests. Known as Msauli (and also Diepgezet), this was once a thriving asbestos mining community, abandoned in 2001 when the mineral's health issues came to worldwide attention.

As I am trying to capitalise on the limited cell phone signal available, Riaan walks up to me and says, "Come check this out, I feel sick." I see a sign that says 'Recreational Club' as Riaan takes me through a door made of railway sleepers. A stunning spectacle greets me; a bar where everything is made with sleepers. While we are walking through the room, dodging pieces of broken furniture and glass bottles I find myself trying to imagine what the bar was like

when it was operational, but I am interrupted and brought out of imagination station by Riaan saying, "You haven't seen the best part." As we pass the secondary private bar and kitchen I see a snooker table slowly appearing around the corner. I am not quite ready for what appears as I enter the room – a full-size slate snooker table. Here, in a town where the people stealing cables are waving at us as we drive through, is this gem of a bar with an untouched snooker table.

The town also has a nine-hole golf course and a swimming pool so big you can launch jet-skis from it; well, that's according to Moses, the Chief of Council, from the local tribe who accompanies us on this visit.

At the end of another scorching day, with little hiding from the sun, we make a quick re-supply trip to Elukwatini, 37km away from our base at Kromdraai. It's the closest place to find major shops like Spar and various restaurants.

In the evening, a few Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency employees join us for a braai at Kromdraai, where we have some very

AT A GLANCE

Ebutsini 4x4 Trail

Start point:

26°05'05.8"S

30°59'38.6"E

Cost: R350

Distance:

30km

Time to complete:

5 hours

Conditions:

Mostly Jeep track with a few narrow rocky sections

Difficulty:

Grade 2-3

Bookings:

017 884 0352

Making our way up the rocky Ebutsini 4x4 Trail.





interesting conversations about the area and specifically Msauli village. There is so much rich history in the Barberton area, much of it associated with the changing fortunes of the mining industry, and I sit for hours listening to the locals telling stories with a passion that is hard to beat.

The Ebutsini Trail

At 07:00 the alarms go off, and we groan out of bed as we have planned an early video shoot with our guests from the previous night. After the shoot and a quick breakfast, we move out of the reserve and head south to the Ebutsini Cultural Centre to meet Amos, who will be our 4x4 route guide for the day.

Ebutsini proves to be a more difficult trail with a few tricky ascents, very narrow sections, and slippery grass descents. Once again, experience and low range are compulsory.

The trail rewards us with beautiful vistas and various types of rock, especially white quartz.

We even find mushrooms so large they dwarf two big DSLR cameras side by side. Everywhere you drive in this area you are reminded of the mining industry. One of the hills has 13 shafts dug into it, but with no success, according to Gideon who is driving with us.

We eventually make it to 'white quartz donga', a part of the trail that you can only go through if you have a winch. Neither of our vehicles has winches, so we think we will just look at it and find an alternative route. Riaan, then, has the great idea of driving down into the donga, turning the car around and then driving out the way the car came in. Anton isn't keen on the idea, but after some persuasion, he agrees that it can be done safely, and once again, the Isuzu impresses us with its ability to crawl over obstacles.

There are plenty of scenic viewpoints to stop at along the route, which is not all challenging, plus we come across a number of villages comprising round beehive huts, where we are given a friendly welcome.

Top left

The D-Max 2.5 proves very capable on the trails, going up rocky climbs and down grassy slopes with ease.

Top right

The young men of the Ebutsini Cultural Centre playing their skin drums during the dance.

Above left

A three-point turn in White Quartz donga turned out to be a bit of a tight squeeze.

Above right

A Swazi boy gets ready for the dancing, at the Ebutsini Cultural Centre.

WHAT WE DROVE

Our vehicle for the trip was the Isuzu D-Max 2.5 double-cab, in a very stylish 'Pepper Dust' hue that really blended in with the environment.

With 100kW and 320Nm on tap, the 2.5 is more suited for trails than fast highway cruising but will get the job done. It had no problems climbing up steep, rocky hills in low range.

Its road-holding abilities on gravel roads are very impressive, and here it shines as an overlanding suited vehicle. Our test unit was fitted with a canopy, which kept all our travel gear safe.

For many, the price saving offered on the 2.5, as against the flagship 3.0-litre, is the right way to go, enabling one to still fit a selection of accessories – even with a tighter budget.

After another long and hot day of being thrown around in the car, we make another supply run with the Isuzu making easy-going of gravel roads, before we head over to the western entrance of Songimvelo, to meet up with Gideon. Our plan is to take a west-east route through the reserve to get back to Kromdraai campsite. However, the vague directions from the man who runs the luxury lodge on the western entrance ("Just follow the main route") soon have us lost among the many options through the reserve.

A fitting finale

Time is a problem, as we have to get back to Ebutsini Cultural Centre for dinner and a Swazi 'cultural experience', so we get back onto the main gravel road linking Elukwatini and Ebutsini. After a quick stop to freshen up, we get back to the centre. We are not quite sure what to expect. We are treated to a half-hour of various powerful Swazi dances, which is more than

enough for me on video duty, holding a heavy camera and gimbal. We also have no idea of what food we will be served, but as we walk into the gogo's hut we are met with various hearty aromas of great food, prepared with a Swazi twist.

But my personal highlight of the trip is still to come. As we sit down for dinner our hostess says, "Jacques this is for you," and the entire room proceeds to sing 'Happy Birthday' for me.

What's the deal? My father had phoned the centre and asked them to do it. So to have something like this done for me, in such a beautiful part of our country, made my first trip with the magazine a special event.

For all you other travellers, there is much on offer in or near Songimvelo. Apart from the incredible views wherever you drive, with two 4x4 trails in proximity, a large nature reserve to explore, and a variety of accommodation options on the cards, this is a great area worth exploring. ●

This little gravel hill climb offers a nice teaser of what to expect from the Barberton area trails.





WHERE TO STAY **LUXURY**

If you are looking for luxury accommodation in the area, consider staying at Mountain Aloe Den. It offers more luxurious cabins than Kromdraai and has a near 240° view, but capacity is limited.

Location:
25°56'40.6"S
31°06'54.0"E

Price:
R700 per room

Bookings:
Isaac
072 088 7098

CAMPING

If you want to camp, Kromdraai has plenty of sites available about 14km into Songimvelo Nature Reserve.

Location:
26°02'31.9"S
31°00'15.1"E

Price:
R200 per site
(max 6 people)

Bookings:
Robert
013 759 5300



Top
Mountain Aloe Den has incredible views and offers luxury accommodation at a reasonable price.

Above left
Dinner is served. Piping hot dishes with a Swazi twist.

Above right
This perfectly round dung ball was slightly larger than a golf ball.

FOR THE AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE

Want to fully immerse yourself in the culture with a dab of luxury? Ebutsini Cultural Centre offers Swazi huts that have been converted into very comfy accommodation with electricity, water, and ablutions.

Location:
26°05'05.5"S
30°59'38.7"E

Price:
R350 per person/
R595 sharing

Bookings:
Thuli
082 815 4744



Stay on the bright side

Mind control can save lives

Words & pictures **Paul Donovan**

One of the greatest killers in a survival situation is often not the situation itself, but what's going on in your mind. Your psychological state can have a great impact on whether you survive or perish.

Often the negative thoughts can be stronger than the rational ones, and these can lead you to do otherwise irrational things.

Do not believe that only the strongest will survive. Simply not true. There is an interesting story of a US pilot in World War II who crashed his plane on a lake. The lake was surrounded by trees which would have offered all the resources to survive. Bear in mind that not only was he trained in survival/bushcraft,

escape, and evasion, he would also have had a survival kit with him. Long story short, apparently he had a last smoke, took out his pistol, and killed himself. Why would a trained and experienced person take themselves out in such a situation, surrounded as they were by all the elements needed to survive? The decisive factor seems to be what is going on in the mind at the time.

There are stories of people who have cut off their arm with a pocket knife because they had such a strong will to survive. I suppose until we are in such a situation, reality may be very different from theory.

No matter how much training we do, we know that at the end of the day we are

going home. In a true survival situation, that realisation could be a distant dream. The will to survive is all about having a positive attitude and the desire to come through it.

Some people seem to give up even before they begin (as the pilot did), while the will to live is so strong in others that they can surmount incredible odds.

Here are a few pointers, when it comes to trying to cope with the psychological side of survival. They are not in any particular order.

Loneliness

This, perhaps, is the biggest enemy in a survival situation and can creep up on you at any time. If you are one of those people who cannot cope without people around you,

or on the other end of a social app, you may find it very hard to have a positive outlook in a survival situation. You might have to work harder than most to reverse that feeling of loneliness.

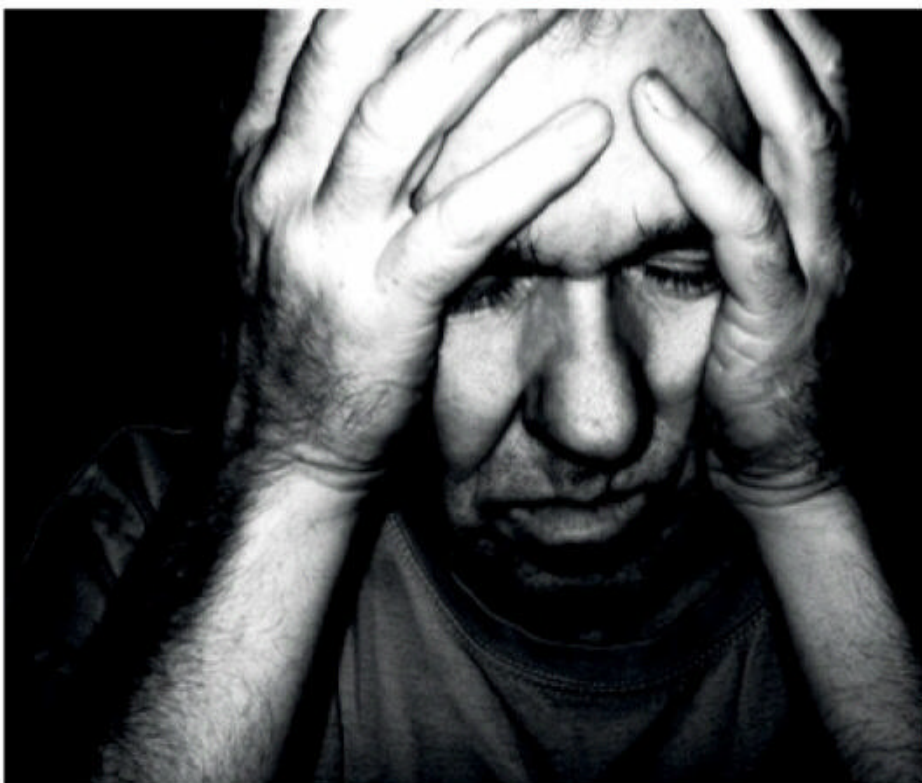
The simplest tactic is to fight loneliness by keeping busy. Stimulate the mind by doing different tasks: gather wood for a fire, build a shelter, find food, even talk to yourself if you have to, but avoid the temptation of allowing the brain to focus on you being the only person around. Try not to allow yourself to become bored, because loneliness will just feed off that. Even the most mundane of tasks will be a weapon against the negativity loneliness can instil in you.



Loneliness is a big enemy in survival situations.



Fear is a component of our survival instinct.



Depression is a negative state that can be hard to reverse.

Fear

Believe it or not, fear is actually an in-built survival instinct and comes into play through the course of our daily lives. I ride a motorbike and the fear of being knocked off by some nutcase of a driver is actually what helps keep me from having an accident.

In a survival situation, fear encompasses so many facets; the fear of getting/being lost, being eaten or trampled by a wild animal, being bitten by a snake, fear of the dark, etc. Fear is not actually borne from being in a situation, but more from an individual's psyche.

Fear is a negative reaction to a situation and can influence one's ability to survive or falter. I suffer from claustrophobia, but I know in a survival situation that a cave will be my saviour. I, therefore, have to learn how to control that 'closed-in feeling', before it controls me.

Again, it is all down to keeping busy and having a positive attitude to the situation you find yourself in. Always try and go to sleep with a positive attitude, otherwise, you will begin to dream about the fear and suddenly wake up in a state of panic – which can be deadly.

Panic

Panic often stems from the belief that you are in a situation you may not be able to control or believe that you cannot control. It is often triggered by a vivid imagination, not always borne through something physical. It's psychological, and the wrong approach to it can lead to a worsening situation. In the worst-case scenario, it could even lead to death.

The key to combating panic is to learn how to

embrace it and relax. Try and reverse the feeling into something positive. Try not to make hasty decisions. Just remember, it is a state of mind which can be of short duration, so try and work your way through it without escalating a molehill into a mountain.

Depression

Be under no illusion; depression can be a killer. Just about all of the psychological disorders mentioned so far can bring on depression, or, conversely, depression can create those psychological disorders.

Depression is a negative state of mind and, as hard as it may be (and it will be very hard), it is vital that you do everything you can to reverse that state of mind. Depression can make you do irrational things, which you may regret later on. You could harm yourself, or, if something is not working properly, you could smash it up, which you could seriously regret later.

As I have just mentioned, depression can be a difficult state of mind to reverse, and once in it, you can spiral into a world of negativity, with catastrophic consequences. Try and nail this one as quickly as possible.

Tail-end

Maintaining a positive mental attitude can make the difference between coming out of a survival situation alive, or perishing. Do not be afraid of loneliness, fear, panic, or any of the other psychological influences you may suffer in a survival situation. Learn to embrace them and turn them into a positive attitude. With the proper mindset, you can create a positive outlook in the worst of situations. ●



Van Zyl's & the Marienfluss

After braving a series of dramatic river crossings, the challenges of Van Zyl's seemed pretty doable... and then there was the spectacular scenery of the Marienfluss to take in. This is what it's like to travel with Simon Steadman of Ultimate Adventures

Story **Simon Steadman** Photography **Desiree Steadman**



Having braved some serious crossings of the Kunene River and spent Christmas at Epupa Falls, it was time to pack up camp and head south away from the Kunene River to the ‘town’ of Okangwati, where we topped up our fuel tanks before heading into the real wilderness of Kaokoland. This stretch of road gradually becomes more challenging and slow-going as you get closer to the community campsite just before the start of Van Zyl’s pass and, in my opinion, can be more challenging than Van Zyl’s pass in some sections with its many cross-axles and dongas to negotiate.

Low-range engaged, we crawled our way along this very scenic track through countless Himba villages until we reached the Van Zyl’s pass

community campsite at the top of the pass. This is a great place to stop-over before tackling the pass, with good but rustic ablutions and scenic campsites next to a dry riverbed (yes, it was dry). After a tasty chicken curry in the riverbed, everyone turned in early in anticipation of what lay ahead of us the next day.

A sting in the tail

Van Zyl’s pass is probably one of the most notorious mountain passes in Africa, with many stories of rolled vehicles and trailers, broken suspensions and other disastrous endings. Maybe it’s an experience thing, but I think there are more treacherous 4x4 trails in South Africa than Van Zyl’s pass if it is tackled correctly and shown the necessary respect. The pass can only be

Top left

Buying fuel from the locals at Okangwati before heading to Van Zyl’s Pass.

Top right

Towing down Van Zyl’s takes precision and control.

Above

The road to Van Zyl’s is just as challenging as the pass in some sections.

driven in an east to west direction and is 10-15 kilometres of hard driving over rocks and through ravines. Most of it is downhill, so traction isn't really an issue; rather making sure you pick the right line and taking it slowly down some of the rocky steps along the way.

I wish I had some adventurous tales to embellish on for this part of the adventure, but, in all honesty, everything went very well and everyone tackled the pass with ease and arrived at the viewpoint near the bottom of the pass unscathed. The best part of this journey down the pass comes as you climb up to the viewpoint and, as you reach the crest and your bonnet lowers, you are met with one of the most spectacular views you will ever experience: when the Marienfluss opens up before you and you feel like you are standing in an oil painting. Photos and videos just cannot capture the beauty of this view and you really have to experience it yourself to feel it.

With only a few kilometres left to the bottom of the pass, we had plenty of time in the bank to sit and soak up the view before tackling the last (and most challenging) obstacle on the pass. When you

reach the edge of this descent most people look at it and think, "How can a vehicle drive down there?" It's at this point that I get everyone out of their vehicles to walk down the rocky steps with me and explain the route to be taken in much detail, so that everyone knows what they need to do and feels comfortable before getting back behind the wheel. This stretch of about 30 metres gets the adrenaline flowing more than the other 12 kilometres put together, but as long as you pay attention (and listen) to your spotter it is much easier than it looks and, once completed, makes the white knuckles and sweaty brow seem pointless. From here it's just a few kilometres to the bottom of the pass and, by the beaming smiles on everyone's faces, I could tell that it was enjoyed by all as they wrote their names on rocks to add to the pile along with other conquerors of Africa's notorious mountain pass.

A bath to soothe the soul

From here we headed into the 'oil painting' of the Marienfluss, with its spectacular 360 degree mountain vistas scattered with the mysterious

Below

Simon guiding a vehicle down one of the tricky sections.





fairy circles, until we reached the Kunene River once again and our overnight stop at the Okarohombo community campsite. By the time we reached our campsite, the sun was still high in the sky and ready to scorch anyone that dared try and set up camp, so I had a surprise in store for the group. “Follow me up river for a few kilometres,” I said, “I have a surprise for you.” Everyone loves a surprise, so there was no complaints about hopping back into the vehicles to see what I had up my sleeve. After a dusty day tackling Van Zyl’s pass, nothing soothes the soul better than a swim in the Kunene River. This idea was first met with looks of terror after the number of crocodiles we had seen lazing on the banks at Epupa Falls and close to our campsite down river, but when they saw the spot I had chosen in the rapids with perfect rock pools to sit in and let the water flow over you, it was a mad dash to this welcome oasis. In fact, at the end of the tour when we asked the group what their highlight of the trip was, this moment came up more than once. Another magic moment that only Africa can deliver!

With everyone rejuvenated by our ‘Kunene Jacuzzi’ it was time to start our journey south for the last leg of the tour, with our next destination being the community-run Ngatutanga campsite in the Hoarusib riverbed. This is where my change of plan came into play, with us opting not to bush camp on our way to Puros but rather use the heavily corrugated D3707 gravel road from Orupembe. The first half of the 230km journey was a spectacular one with us travelling south through the Marienfluss, skirting the Hartman’s mountains, until we reached the famous Red Drum. Here we stopped for a customary photograph and a leg stretch, before tackling the Red Drum Pass – which is a rocky climb that can catch you out if you are not fully switched on for this little challenge.

After a lunch stop in the bush before Orupembe, we hit the horrible D3707 for 110km of bone-jarring corrugations until we reached our campsite in Puros. After about an hour of driving on the corrugations, I thought I could hear a funny knocking noise coming from underneath

Above
View of Marienfluss.

the Land Cruiser but couldn't see anything after a quick inspection so continued on our way. It wasn't until we stopped at our campsite and had another look underneath that I realised both of my rear shock absorbers had broken off from the chassis and I was just riding on the springs. After a quick chat with the locals at the campsite, I found out that there was a workshop at the nearby luxury lodge and they could possibly help me with some bush repairs to my sagging suspension. Dirk and I quickly headed off there to try and get the problem sorted before sunset.

A fix and a flash flood

Once again we were met with open arms and the willingness to help was humbling, to say the least. The local lodge mechanic had my Cruiser jacked up in no time and got to work on 'making a plan' to get my shocks reattached to the chassis. After about half an hour, Des came through on the radio with a message that the river had started flowing and we wouldn't be able to reach the campsite. We were a fair distance from camp so the quality of our comms was pretty poor, but we could just about make out what Des was saying. We were more worried about missing a flash flood in action than not being able to get back to the campsite, and, after about another 45 minutes

with shock absorbers back in position, we raced back to camp to see what we had missed.

Luckily for us, we were on the western side of the Hoarusib River, so we only had to cross a smaller piece of river to get back to camp, but our neighbours were not so lucky. The men in their group had gone for a drive down the riverbed to look for game and were now stranded on the opposite side of the river with no way of getting back to camp that night. The force of the water was too strong to even consider walking through, never mind driving through. They would have to sit it out and reassess the situation in the morning. To say that spirits were high in the group when we got back that evening would be a massive understatement, as they had just witnessed a once-in-a-lifetime event of a river starting to flow, and, as luck would have it, Alti had left their Go Pro running after doing a time lapse of them setting up camp that afternoon, so he had captured the whole thing on film.

"What other surprises does Kaokoland have in store for us?" I thought to myself as I dozed off that night, tempered with, "How are we going to get across this river to continue on our journey to Sesfontein?" Luckily we were staying in Puros for two nights, which would hopefully give the river time to subside before we had to leave.

Below

One of the trickiest sections of the pass just after the viewpoint.

Bottom right

Writing names on rocks at the bottom of pass.



The next morning we were awoken by our neighbours' male companions arriving back at camp, which was a great relief as this meant they had managed to cross the river. "I think our luck is changing," I thought to myself as I wandered over to them to get the low-down, and find out where they had managed to cross the river. Apparently the water levels had dropped significantly overnight, but they were still pretty high and the crossing had to be tackled with caution. Obviously this stirred up some curiosity in the group and it was decided that, after a good breakfast, we would go and have a look for ourselves and assess the situation. Plus everyone was running low on supplies and fuel and we were keen to get to the local 'supermarket' to stock up on a few essential items and get some fuel in the tanks.

The wading continues

On our neighbours' recommendation, we travelled down the river to the main crossing point close to Puros town, as this was apparently where they had crossed that morning. This is normally a dry, sandy track across the riverbed but today it was a completely different picture. The water was still flowing quite quickly and was around knee deep. Luckily the ground was quite rocky so traction wouldn't be a problem this time around. With my trailer anchor sitting quietly in the campsite, I was more than happy to give this a go and find the best line for everyone to get across safely. With everyone piled in the car, I set off in 2nd gear low range and zig-zagged my way across the 100m-wide river crossing, heart pounding, constantly trying to stay on the rocky sections

Below

Drive through Marienfluss to Red Drum.

Bottom right

Welcome cool-off in rapids in the Kunene River.

Opposite page, top

Hoarusib River at Puros.

Middle

Hoarusib River in flood at Puros.

Bottom

Desert town of Puros.





to avoid the soggy river sand that could suck us in at any second. After what felt like an hour (but was probably only about three minutes), we were on dry ground on the other side of the river and headed straight for the local shop/bar/fuel merchant to stock up on some much-needed supplies before heading back to camp.

We decided to amble our way through the dry side of the riverbed, to see what game we could find along the way and hopefully catch a glimpse of the elusive desert elephants that inhabit the region. This time luck was not on our side and they continued to elude us, but we did see plenty of giraffe along the way.

The next morning you could feel the nervous tension in the group, as we broke camp and prepared to cross the river for our journey south to Palmwag Lodge. The 220 kilometres we hoped would take five hours to complete, if everything went according to plan and we all got across the river without any problems. On our game drive the previous day I had spotted another potential crossing point where the river was wider and the water levels looked a lot lower than what we had experienced earlier that day, so I decided to give this one a go. A huge sigh of relief escaped me as we reached the edge of the river that morning, as the water level had dropped even further.





This made for a very easy crossing and, after selecting the best route, we were all through in under half an hour and on our way to Sesfontein where we would refuel and enjoy a lunch stop at Fort Sesfontein – an old German fort that was abandoned in 1914 and had been restored and turned into a lodge.

Stampede for the bar

When we reached Palmwag Lodge that afternoon it was like a stampede of thirsty zebra charging towards a waterhole in the desert, as we all scrambled to get to the welcome oasis of the pool bar. Clearly we hadn't seen civilisation for days. Needless to say, that afternoon (and evening) was spent lying in the pool like a pod of lazy hippos, while sipping on cocktails and reliving the events of

the past few days. It's amazing how much you appreciate the smaller things in life once you have been without them for a period of time, and we certainly made up for it that night. After all, this was our last night in the wilderness as the tar road was just over the horizon and the long trek home lay ahead of us.

From Palmwag Lodge we made our way to Kamanjab, where we all thought we had gone deaf once we started driving on this smooth black stuff that had no corrugations and funny white lines painted on it. With tyres re-inflated and ready for the 2 850km drive back to Joburg, we set off for our second last overnight stop of the tour, which would be at Weaver's Rock Guest Farm just south of Otjiwarongo. This beautiful campsite with spectacular views of the sunset over Mt Klein Waterberg and clean ablutions, is

a great stopover with a nice bush-feel to it. From here we once again used the new tar road to continue our trek south to Gobabis and then on to our last campsite and the place where it had all started two weeks before, at Kalahari Bush Breaks just before the Buitepos border post. From here we would all make our own way home the next day, along the monotonous Trans-Kalahari Highway through Botswana.

Last hurrah

As is customary on all of our tours, the last night is always spent laughing and joking around the fire about the adventures we had shared together with Des going around the group and asking each individual what their highlight of the tour was. It's always interesting for us to hear what

different individuals enjoy and what sticks out in their minds. On this particular trip it was extremely difficult for everyone to pick only one moment that stuck out in their minds, as so much had happened over the last two weeks that would forever be cast into our memory banks. No doubt we would all fondly rehash the stories to friends and family around the braai and dinner table for many months to come. I always wish I could be a fly on the wall, to hear how much the stories change along the way like those old fishing tales your dad used to tell you about the ones that got away. One thing is for sure, we all left this adventure with plenty of stories to tell and mine would go something like this: "Let me tell you about the time we went to the desert and ended up needing a boat instead of a Land Cruiser..." •

CRUISER COUNTRY

Toyota lays on an action-packed few days in south-western Angola with a trio of Land Cruisers

Story **Angus Boswell** Pictures **Cornel van Heerden**



Namib edition 79
Series races the tide
on the Doodsakker.



Above The corrugated 25km river bed route to Flamingo Lodge. **Below left** Sandstone canyons in Parque Nacional do Iona. **Below right** The first vehicle to land on the Isle dos Tigres in many years.



It's taken Angola a long time to emerge from the civil war which ended in 2002. Its effects have dragged on for more than two decades. When war broke out in 1974, tourism effectively stopped. That's changing. The old ruling elite are being sidelined, minefields have largely been cleared, and officialdom is letting go its cranky and slow Soviet practices when it comes to getting things done.

One great aspect of the new spirit of glasnost is that South Africans no longer need a visa to enter this vast country. Its sheer size and mixed road network makes it a challenge for even the hardest overlanders. The rewards are a chance to explore Angola's rich cultural heritage and natural attractions, which vary from sandy desert to tropical forests.

The perfect country, then, for Toyota to launch the Namib special edition of its 79 Series double cab, and to bring along two other key members of a vehicle family that has justly earned a reputation as the 'Master of Africa'. We only have time to explore the highlights of the Namibe province in the south-western corner, but what a great region in which to compare back-to-back drives in the

Prado mid-sized SUV, 200 Series full-sized SUV, and the 79 Series double cab 4.5-litre V8 diesel.

Namibe and the desert

A group of journos cheat a bit on the long drive through Namibia, flying into Windhoek and taking a late afternoon charter flight to the town of Namibe with its brand-new airport. It's very remote in Angola's south, the view from the air dominated by seas of sand dunes broken by deep canyons. The crew from Will of Africa Safaris are waiting with the Land Cruisers, and we hit the freshly-tarred and traffic-free EN280 south as darkness closes in. Clearly, money is being spent on infrastructure.

The Flamingo Lodge turn-off looms an hour later; time to drop tyre pressures using the clever In-Deflate tool, which equalises across two wheels. Then it's a 25km shocker through the dry bed of the Flamingo River, dodging rocks and bushes, hitting jumps, and rattling to the bump stops over severe corrugations. Our 200 Series is lapping up the punishment, keeping passengers insulated from the bangs and thumps underneath. A final stretch of sand takes us to the lodge, which is

PARQUE NACIONAL DO IONA

Angola's largest national park covers just over 15 000 square kilometres in an area extending 180km south from the Cunene River to the Curoca River in the north, ending some 200km south of the town of Namibe. It's been a park since 1964 but suffered heavy faunal losses from poaching during the war years. New management, under non-profit conservation organisation African Parks (www.africanparks.org), might change the lax controls.

A region of vast plains and massive shifting dunes, along with zones of weathered sedimentary mountains and cliff faces, it is considered to be southern Africa's only true desert. Iona is contiguous with the Skeleton Coast National Park of Namibia (and the Namib-Naukluft Park below that), forming an unbroken 500km of coastline alongside the Atlantic Ocean's Benguela Current, responsible for a cold upwelling, which makes for rich fishing territory and characteristic heavy fogs inland.

ISLE DOS TIGRES

Discovered in 1486 by Portuguese sailor Diogo Cao and established as the fishing village of Tigres from the 1860s, the island is named after the characteristic striped dunes on the adjacent mainland. In the past, this was the Baia dos Tigres, linked to the mainland by a narrow isthmus, and so the higher temperatures of the bay formed and nurtured it as a rich marine spawning ground.

A fish processing factory and community comprising more than 50 houses and a church were built to capitalise on this industry. However, in 1962 a water pipeline supplying the 1 500 or so inhabitants was ruptured in a storm and carried on flowing, severing the narrow sand bar. Water was initially shipped over to the island, and plane drops of food and medical supplies continued, but the last remaining residents were evacuated when war broke out in 1974. It's been a ghost town since. Toyota's Namib edition was the first vehicle to drive on the island in 25 years.



Above left 200 Series blasts a stretch of Namib beach. **Above right** Rico Sakko tells the story of the Baie dos Tigres. **Below** Abandoned bunkers that housed thousands of troops during the war.



perched tenuously in the stony cliffs in a small bay – a collection of mostly basic wooden structures. Water comes from a pipeline to a distant river, electricity from a generator.

This fishing outpost is run by old Angola hand Rico Sakko, whose team takes things in their stride, putting on a brilliant seafood feast including the biggest oysters I have ever seen, and supplying a steady stream of cold drinks. It's a festive night, headed by TSA's sales and marketing man Calvyn Hamman and flanked by old friend Jean Engelbrecht of Rust en Vrede (who supplies the excellent wines). Johan Badenhorst of Voetspore fame is also there; he knows the area well. Will Jansen of Will of Africa Safaris is in charge of logistics, along with conservation expert Lorraine Doyle. Things could not get better; this is a proper collection of Land Cruiser owners and enthusiasts.

Welwitschias & red cliffs

Sunrise reveals the hard-topped dunes that backdrop the lodge, and a stretch of black, mineral-rich beach extending to the horizon. After a quick breakfast, there is a chance to jump

into the 79 Series. It feels fully at home here: large and in charge. It's a big and basic brute of a vehicle, and the Namib edition has a few extras to give it the edge. Over the same 25km gravel stretch towards the tar and the town of Tombua, what shines out is the capability of this truck. It feels unbreakable, roaring over the bumps with authority. The convoy stops near a giant specimen of *Welwitschia mirabilis*, and Lorraine explains its biology; it's a desert specimen of great age, changing little over dozens, if not hundreds of years, fed moisture by the incoming fog which enables it to survive in this dry part of the world.

At a nearby guard post, we turn into a massive field of desert sand that slowly evolves into a brooding mass of abandoned concrete bunkers, a legacy of the recent war and a holding place for thousands of probably Cuban troops and their vehicles. Remarkably it was never discovered by SA reconnaissance fly-overs; all that remains are some scattered boots, a few bullet casings and thousands of rusting tins.

Our route moves to the Parque Nacional do Iona, which is signposted but unmanned. Red dusty roads give way to a maze of canyons, a layer cake

of the millennia. Our hosts set up a camouflage net tent in the blazing sun and we explore this ancient canyon complex in the Cruisers, learning about its origins and telling tall stories over the lunch table.

The journey back northwards is in the Prado with its D-4D diesel and comfy pews, following the dust trails and tar back to the Flamingo Lodge turn-off. Even with tyres deflated the SUV doesn't have quite the sheer grit or bump compliance of its heavier-duty cousins. We are banging through yumps, slowing down for sections the other trucks are speeding through. Yet our tests rate this vehicle right up there for off-road capability.

The evening treat is a drive into the massive amphitheatre behind the lodge, another marvel of stacked cliffs enclosing millions of fossils. Huge rivers must have flowed here; a legacy of this landscape which is said to be 56-80 million years old. At sunset, a picnic is set up overlooking another stretch of empty, unspoilt beach. Life's tough in Africa!

The double Doodsakker

A very early start sees the convoy leave the lodge as the sun is rising, tackling the riverbed stretch in the Prado. It's best to drive slower than the rest, particularly when negotiating bigger dips. Breakfast on the run is at a newly-built fuel station

in the tatty fishing village of Tombua, where dozens of three-wheeler 'Keweseki' mini-trucks made in China arrive, the local utility option of choice, along with the usual buzz of 125cc Chinese motorbikes. Fuel is a third of South Africa's inflated price, the equivalent of R4/litre – perfect for a fleet of thirsty 4x4s.

The plan is to tackle the infamous Doodsakker, a narrow 50km passage between the Namib's dunes and the Atlantic that leads down to the Cunene River mouth. Timing is critical: to get through at dead low tide the Cruisers race the clock along incredible sand flats where giant flocks of cormorants wheel and turn, feeding on stranded sardines.

The beach drive is a blast. Traction control off, in high-range, I put foot along the packed sand, churn through a few soft sections where the waves are still rolling up a narrow 15-metre stretch of beach, and take a few watery hits when a wave surge is mistimed. The Cruisers are in their element: bombing the tough stuff. A squad of adventurers in hire vehicles – mostly 80 Series Cruisers – rollick past with wide grins. There's a theme here.

Rico's crew have gone ahead to a small inlet where a rubber duck with two 50hp motors is moored. The boat struggles to get on the plane on the flat sea with its big load but is soon

THE DOODSAKKER

This dangerous 50km passage sandwiched between the Atlantic Ocean and steep dunes of the Namib Desert runs northwards from Foz do Cunene (mouth of the Cunene River) to the town of Tombua. Long considered a rite of passage, literally, it was named by former SA army sergeant major Koos Moorcroft, and has claimed more than its share of vehicles. It must be driven without delay during low spring tide, or at neap tide low, taking into account weather and swell conditions. Impassable rock sections can also be exposed after heavy swells, so consult Tracks4Africa updates (www.t4a.co.za) and local operators such as Rico Sakko of Flamingo Lodge and Angola Adventure Safaris (+244 (0)92 349 4992/ +244 (0)93 378 2226).



Sunset picnic on a deserted stretch of Angolan coast behind Flamingo Lodge.

SERRA DA LEBA PASS

Built in the 1970s to a design by a team led by a Portuguese woman Maria Alice Leba, this dramatic 10km-long pass rises from the lowlands of Namibe to 1 845 metres above sea level in a very short, steep stretch that ends 36km south of the town of Lubango. It is characterised by multiple hairpins fronted by steep surrounding cliff faces. Part of the tarred Estrada Nacional 280 (EN280), its 56 curves and twists have earned it a reputation as the best stretch of road in Angola. Strangely, a toll is levied on vehicles driving down the pass, but going up is mahala.

humming over the 8km stretch, which links to the Isle dos Tigres in the distance. This island used to be the endpoint of a huge fish-rich bay before the connecting sandbar was washed away in the Sixties.

A white Namib edition perched among Toyota flags greets us on the island; it's the first vehicle to drive there since the last residents left the surrounding ghost town in 1974 – nearly 46 years. The crumbling buildings would have been painted in vibrant colours, and are all on stilts to prevent sand build-up underneath them. There's a cemetery, an old fishing factory, and a still-intact church with a lookout tower. Lunch is served in what used to be the central hall and bioscope.

Then it's time to leave, as the wind is riffling the sea. The Cruiser needs to be loaded up on the 10-metre square raft, purpose-built by Rico and his team. A few of the journos have gone AWOL to the lighthouse on the island's northern tip. There is no way to contact them and the tide waits for nobody. After their return, it's a three-hour operation to load the vehicle on the raft and tug it to the striped dunes of the mainland which give the island its name.

The slow pace on the boat is great, and bizarre in a 'Heart of Darkness' way, though we've missed the tide window and it will be too dark to tackle the alternative route along the dunes. Still, a recce trip up some nearby steep dune faces and a slip

face or two gets the adrenaline going. Driving along the spines of impossibly-perfect dunes as the sun sinks is sublime. I get stuck a few times before getting the hang of easing down the slope to gain momentum. You want to be in high range with the diff locks off. I get stuck in low range, not wanting to stop and hold up the convoy. A rookie error. A final steep pitch to a vantage point overlooking a tiny bay reveals nothing for miles, apart from great ranks of dunes.

Luckily there is some hot, meaty stew waiting for the stranded part of the group back at the ramshackle collection of huts, which Rico has called Camp Relief, in the lee of a shoreside dune. The next low tide is at 23:00, so it's waiting time. But at 21:00 Rico makes the call: "Keep your pace, don't stop, follow in my tracks. This is serious stuff, we can't afford a mishap." And the Cruisers hit the Doodsakker for the second time in a day. Slushy sand sections threaten to bog the Prado, though the driver keeps his foot planted and gets through. A full-on wave blast, on two or three occasions, threatens to engulf a few of the vehicles. Its teeth-gritting stuff with a few whoops of fright thrown in. As the critical part is done, Will's loaded 70 Series Cruiser hoves into view stranded halfway up the escape dune. What happened?

The pace is stern; no hanging about. Then the white Cruiser ahead slows and the brake lights come on – a bunch of cormorants have smashed



Serra da
Leba Pass – a
remarkable
engineering feat.

into the windscreen. A small patch of clear glass is enough to see through, so it's on to Tombua for a quick refuel and then the gravel torture test back to the lodge for a quick bite, a welcome drink, and a dose of shut-eye.

The famous pass

The adventure's last day begins with another very early start, aiming up the tarred EN280 to Lubango and its international airport. I grab a 200 for this stretch, with some intent, wanting its cruise control and effortless ability to travel distances at pace and in pure luxury. The tar is heavily potholed in places, the small towns – with evident Portuguese heritage – are bustling with people going about their commerce. Angola is on the rise, and the towns are mostly neat and clean, though there are stark contrasts in wealth.

Open dry plains dotted with baobabs and the occasional farmer's subsistence plot mark the route north. The big attraction is the Serra da Leba Pass, which comes upon us just as the vegetation becomes lush. Its bends are as dramatic as the pictures show, the views over the surrounding plains are re-exposed with each new turn. This really is an engineering marvel, which gives way just over its crest to small businesses dotting the roadside and the town of Lubango. Here, busy streets, shopping malls replete with Checkers outlets, and traffic jams due to roadworks are all too familiar.

As for the vehicles, nothing's gone wrong in any way, despite serious hammering over all sorts of terrain – apart from a dinged bumper due to driver error. The Cruisers are typically ready for more, confirming their reputation as tough and reliable, can-do 4x4s. ●

Johan Badenhorst makes a fine point to journo Cyril Klopfer.



Giant *Welwitschia mirabilis* up front, Land Cruiser range behind. All hardy specimens.



LAND CRUISER FAMILY PRADO

Offered in three trim grades (TX, VX, and VX-L), with either a 3.0-litre D4-D turbodiesel or V6 4.0-litre petrol. The diesel derivative we drove, due for replacement, puts out 120kW and 400Nm, and is coupled to a five-speed auto transmission, with a claimed 8.5-litres/100km fuel index.

This mid-sized luxury SUV in the top trim grade has all the mod-cons including KDSS, MTS, and centre and rear diff locks, offering luxury and seven seats. It's the ideal family vehicle. Like the others carrying the Cruiser moniker, it can take a punch, though it is more of a cross-over than an out-and-out workhorse.

200 SERIES

The true Master of Africa when it comes to bullish 4x4 ability, the 200 is an evolution of the bulletproof 80 Series, now boasting independent front double wishbone suspension and a multi-link rear set-up, coupled to Toyota's KDSS levelling system. The gutsy 4.5-litre turbodiesel V8 available in SA, with 195kW and 650Nm it is coupled to a six-speed auto and a full suite of 4x4 gear including Multi Terrain Select and 360-degree view cameras. The pinnacle of luxury with a giant touchscreen and other comfort technologies, it uses sensible 285/60 R17 rubber and comes locally in two grades: basic GX (with a snorkel and rear barn-type doors) and ultra-plush VX-R. For ultimate ride comfort in the harshest of terrains, the 200 has no equal at this price point.

79 SERIES NAMIB EDITION

The 70 Series range is considered the original workhorse 4x4 that has kept

going under the most difficult load-carrying conditions, earning it a solid reputation in applications from agriculture to the military. Put that down to the classic formula of ladder-frame chassis, solid axles front and rear (both with diff locks), coupled to leaf springs in the rear and coils upfront. It is offered in single- and double-cab variants (and the 76 Series Station Wagon), with a 4.0-litre V6 petrol, 4.2-litre straight-six natasp diesel, and 4.5-litre V8 turbodiesel with 151kW and 430Nm. The Namib edition double cab, inspired by the challenging conditions thrown up by the Namib Desert, uses the latter engine. It was conceived around a late-night campfire by Toyota sales and marketing VP Calvyn Hamman and friends, including Jean Engelbrecht of Rust en Vrede.

Apart from cosmetic changes, including a new honeycomb grille and badging, it is accessorised with a range of well-chosen overlanding-ready goodies, which in this case do not void the 3-year/100 000km warranty. These include an ARB bullbar with high-intensity Lightforce spotlights and a sturdy rear tubular step bumper with an integrated towbar. The load body is given a protective skin, seats are covered with Namib-branded canvas covers and a roof console added with a storage binnacle, LED lights, and two-way radio mount. The suspension has been upgraded with Old Man Emu hardware and the tyres are 265/75 R16 Cooper Discoverer ST Maxx items on 16-inch alloys. This is in addition to the standard touchscreen audio with navigation, ABS, and central locking. This is a utility vehicle, so no traction control and other nannies. Transmission is five-speed manual.



SOLAR 2: THE BOTSWANA TEST

Two weeks on the road and an exploration of the Okavango Delta's attractions is a stern test for Rob Thompson's new solar set-up for his Imagine caravan.

By **Rob Thompson**

Although as a family we have travelled and camped extensively in South Africa, Andrew, a friend from work, inspired us with his stories of travel in Botswana.

When our friends Stamatis and Helen suggested a camping trip to Botswana in the 2019 July school holidays we decided this was the ideal opportunity to go and see

what it was like for ourselves. So the planning began.

Andrew's advice was to focus on a specific area rather than try to see the whole country in a single trip. The decision was to head for the Okavango Delta, and to use a booking agent in Botswana to simplify the planning process – they have good knowledge of what works, and could change reservations if there was an emergency.

OUR ITINERARY

Night	Camp
1	Matamba Bush Camp (1 hour from the border)
2	Khama Rhino Sanctuary
3	Kubu Island
4	Maun – Island Safari Lodge
5-7	Mankwe Camp (near South Gate)
8-10	Mbudi Camp (Khwai)
11	Little Pan (near Maun)
12-13	Mokoro trip into the Delta
14	Planet Baobab
15	Woodlands (Francistown)



Left The campsite selected by Glen at Khama Rhino Sanctuary was amazing. The kids had a ball climbing the baobab trees. **Above** The outdoor shower at Matamba. **Below** The solar panels generated 129W at 8:30am in winter. Very impressive!

Our two families did some rough planning of places we wanted to see and we then got in touch with Glen, from Liquid Giraffe, to help finalise our trip. We were keen to include some of the wild camping sites in Moremi but since we were booking only 10 months in advance there were no sites available. Glen suggested some campsites that were close to Moremi as good alternates. Helen is also in the travel industry and suggested we do something special in the Delta itself, which she would book.



Sunset on the pan just before arriving at Kubu Island – spectacular!



Day 1:

The road from Durban

We travelled from Durban to Matamba Bush Lodge via Johannesburg, where we borrowed a portable electric fence from our friend Bruce, whose advice it was, as he had previously camped in unfenced Botswana sites with young kids. We got to Matamba a bit late, but it was the perfect stop for us. We made a lovely fire with the wood supplied and enjoyed a braai for dinner. The caravan batteries had received a good

charge from driving most of the day, so we didn't bother plugging into the mains.

Day 2:

Khama via Stockpoort

We travelled from Matamba to Khama Rhino sanctuary via the Stockpoort border post, and we were through within 30 minutes. Border fees in Botswana needed to be paid in Pula, so we got some Pula from the currency exchange on the South African side before crossing over. The campsite selected by Glen at

Khama Rhino sanctuary was amazing; we camped below two baobab trees and set up the solar panels to catch the morning sun.

Day 3:

On to Kubu Island

As the trip to Kubu island was only 240km we took it slow in the morning. The solar panels did an amazing job generating 129W of power by 08:30. We left them connected while we did a bit of a game drive through the reserve.

The actual trip to Kubu Island took longer than we had anticipated. We needed to fill up extra fuel containers, and the section to the pan itself had many tracks to choose from with some heavily rutted or overgrown. We used Tracks4Africa in our Garmin, which worked well and focused on heading in the right general direction rather than sticking to the exact track shown.

We stopped on the pans to watch the sunset, which



Our only regret was not having stayed for two nights at Kubu Island, it's such a special place.



An aeroplane flight gives you a great view of the Delta itself, this year the rains have been much lower than normal.

was breathtaking and then did the last 8km in the dark. Kubu Island itself is fairly rustic but extremely beautiful. We had a braai for dinner and set up the panels to catch the morning sun.

Before going to bed the 'boys' managed a run across the pan in total darkness, something we had been planning for a while. This was some of the best stargazing we had ever seen, with the milky way stretching from one side of the horizon to the other.

Day 4:

The wonderful pans

We woke up early to see the sunrise over the pan and it did not disappoint. We walked onto the pan, still in our pyjamas, with coffee in hand to get a good view of the sunrise shining across the vast emptiness – and a chance to view the island on foot from a distance. We had a fairly long drive to get to Maun, so we packed up after breakfast. The panels, once again, did a great job generating 147W by 08:15.

We headed to Maun, the actual trip to get to the main road took longer than expected, with some lovely sand driving and a good dose of, "Which track do we choose?" The garage in Gweta did not have a working compressor, so we pumped up the vehicle tyres using our compressors. This was the first time we got a hint that all was not well in the Conqueror, which Stamatis had rented for the trip. The batteries were running very low, even

though they should have been charging via his vehicle.

We headed into Maun to buy supplies for the next week or so. I had emailed our meat order to Beef Boys before we left and they had everything ready to go, frozen and individually packed as per our request. Travelling with fresh meat in Botswana is a complicated affair, as they have veterinary fences to prevent the spread of disease to the cattle farming areas – which is why we bought our meat in Maun

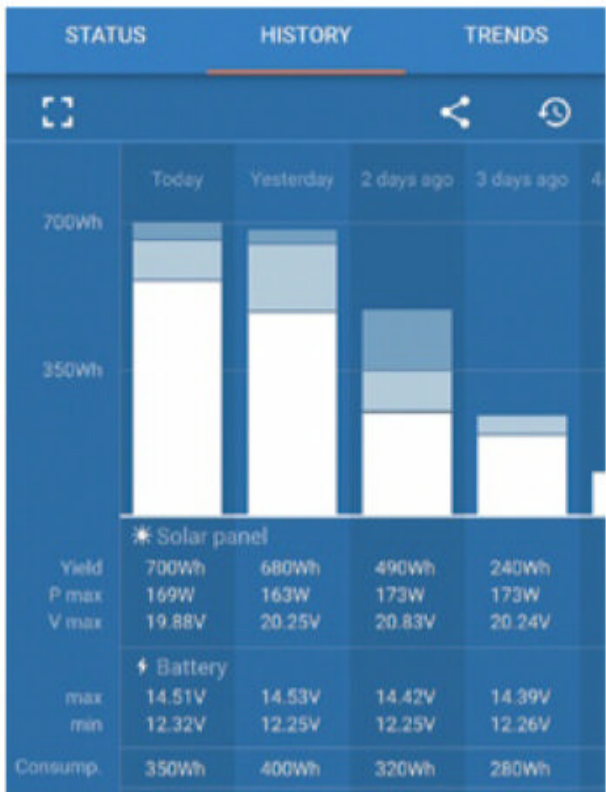
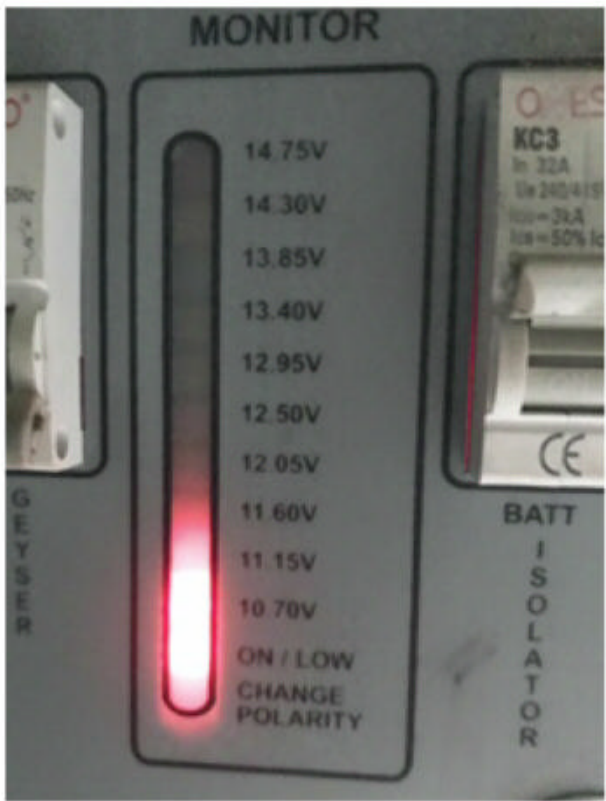


Left
Our upgraded camp at Mankwe meant there wasn't much setup required.

Below left
We had a visitor in the camp on our first night.

Below middle
The Conqueror batteries were not charging!

Below right
The difference between the yield and the consumption is the power going to the Conqueror, we were generating double what we were consuming.



rather than take it in with us. Shopping complete, we moved to Island Safari Lodge for the night – a lovely stop with spacious campsites under shady trees. Stamatis plugged in their caravan to add some charge to the Conqueror batteries, but we ran off our batteries.

Day 5:
Airborne from Maun
Before our next leg to Mankwe we drove into Maun and hopped on an hour-long flight over the Okavango

Delta. This amazing experience gave us a good overview of the Delta itself. We saw the hippo paths in the water and were lucky enough to spot a rhino and two lionesses on the move. After the flight we did the final pack up and headed north to Mankwe, stopping to buy firewood just outside town. The price of wood increases dramatically the closer to Moremi you get. The road north starts as tar and then transitions to a dirt road that sees lots of traffic.

Even though there was a grader actively maintaining portions of the road, it's very corrugated. We dropped tyre pressures and tried to stick to 40km/h to keep the rattles to a tolerable level, plus stopped every 20km or so to make sure all doors on the caravan were securely closed and nothing had come loose. This is something we have added to our travelling routine after a previous bad experience in the Baviaanskloof. We eventually got to Mankwe, having enjoyed

some exciting sand driving to get to the campsite itself. Even though we had booked and paid for a campsite we had been upgraded to a private camp with permanent tents so we didn't need to do too much setup of the caravans. Since we were camping where there were wild animals we erected the portable electric fence to act as a deterrent, only using it at night until we went to bed. The campsite itself was nice, with an ablution block with showers that you

**Above**

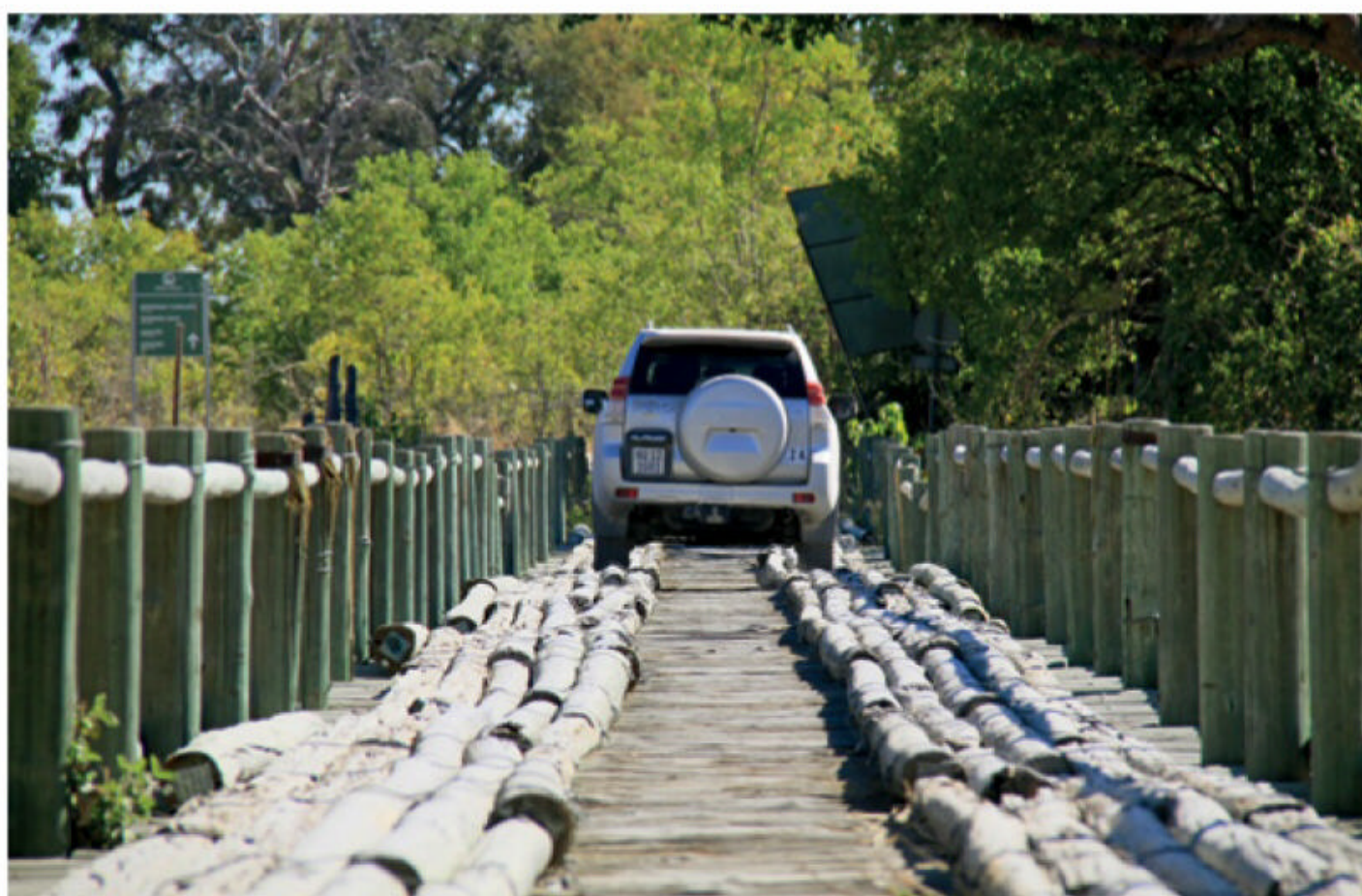
The close proximity to the wildlife is what makes this campsite so special.

Left

"Another tough day in Africa!"

Below

The bridge at North Gate.



need to heat the water for. There is no electricity so we hauled out the solar panels to catch the last of the sun. There is a fire pit with a grid, which made for some lovely evenings around the fire and under the stars.

Days 5 & 6:**Mankwe surprises**

After a night of hyenas calling close by, we woke up to two surprises: a large spoor in the camp and some alarmingly low battery levels in the Conqueror. We made sure the solar panel for the Conqueror was in the sun and gave it a good wash as we would be heading out to North Gate for the day. Our solar setup, on the other hand, was working amazingly well, pushing out 173W at 10:50 – our batteries safely being kept fully topped up with lots of headroom.

When we returned from North Gate the batteries in the Conqueror were still not charging; not a great situation, as we were going to be without electricity for the next seven nights. We decided to connect the Conqueror to our caravan and have our solar setup charge both vans, as we had an MPPT charger and much larger, high-efficiency panels.

The following day we did a trip to South Gate, which was a long drive and, with the lower water levels, we did not see as much game as we did around North Gate. If we were to do it again we would probably have just spent a lazy day at camp and skipped South Gate altogether, as the time in the car each day was starting to take its toll.

On the bright side, even though the batteries on the Conqueror were not fully charged they did seem a lot better.

Day 7, 8 & 9:

Mbudi camp in the Khwai

We packed up and headed north to Khwai, where we stopped at Mbudi community camp; probably the nicest camp we have ever stayed at. It is just so beautiful and since it's on the river the game viewing from our camp chairs was very good. When we arrived we spent a bit of time selecting the best spots for the two caravans, so we had shade. Once the caravans were in place we got a visit from an elephant who happily ate from the tree near our site before checking us out and casually moving off to the river.

Once the elephant had moved off we set up the electric fence around the whole camp, just in time for a hippo to walk past too.

We put up the solar panels and again connected the two

caravans, as during the trip to Mbudi the batteries did not seem to have charged from the car at all.

Mbudi is also pretty rustic but there is an ablution block with toilets and showers fed by water from the river, which is relatively clean but certainly not drinkable. In fact, the last supply of safe drinking water had been Khama Rhino Sanctuary. Even the water in Maun was not safe for drinking due to extremely low rainfall.

We did some day trips into Moremi via North Gate, which is an easy 10km drive and we were very lucky with our game viewing. We spotted leopard and lion on the same day, which completed the Big 5 for us.

Mbudi is a practical compromise for those with kids, as there is still plenty of game around since the



Above Solar panels strapped to the roof, with the fridge running in the caravan. **Below** This picture was taken from our campsite at Mbudi, where there is game viewing from your chair.





reserves themselves are not fenced and there are basic amenities which make it a bit more comfortable.

The SunPower panels had been doing a great job of powering two caravans, pushing out a whopping 990Wh in a single day. We decided to have a look and see if we could identify the issue. After removing the covers for the battery compartments on the Conqueror, we found the battery terminals on both batteries had worked themselves loose, probably on the corrugated roads. This would explain why the batteries were simply not able to charge.



Above
The swimming pool at Little Pan.

Left
The lounge area at Little Pan.

Below
The swimming pool at Planet Baobab was a bit cold but it was the middle of winter after all.



Day 10: Little Pan luxury near Maun

We packed up camp and travelled down to Maun, the highlight was seeing a whole herd of giraffe run across the road ahead of us. The grader had made some good progress on a few sections of the road to Maun, but there were still some rough sections that needed patience.

We had arranged to spend one night at a new luxury lodge just outside Maun called Little Pan, and what a treat that was. The lodge itself is amazing, with a huge fixed tent for the lounge and kitchen area. Accommodation is in private fixed tents with en suite bathrooms and an outdoor shower for the more adventurous. From the moment we arrived the lodge staff made us feel so special. We all jumped into the swimming pool, even though it was the middle of winter and later that evening we had an amazing meal out under the stars.

Stamatis arranged for an extension cord, so the mains



Top left Mokoro's heading to camp. **Top right** It's quite a different experience when you view wild animals on foot. **Above left** The impressive Okavango Delta camp, where everything was brought in via Mokoro. **Above right** This is the 'real deal'; the Big 5 are around.

charger could recharge the Conqueror batteries, but we had just tied the solar panels to the roof rack on the Landy, as they had been working so well.

Day 11 & 12:

Into the Delta on Mokoros

We left Little Pan clean and refreshed, and looking forward to our next treat – which was poling into the Delta on mokoros, where we would spend two nights at an all-inclusive pop-up campsite.

We parked our vehicles at Tswii Mokoro Trails and left the Conqueror plugged into the mains, while I strapped the solar panels onto the Landy's roof rack for what was going to be the acid test – no ventilation in the caravan with a running fridge and solar panels that would

be partially shaded and not aligned with the sun during the day.

When we arrived at the boat station we had a quick packed lunch and were then split into two people per Mokoro, with each Mokoro having its own poler. Liam, who is just seven and had needed special permission to come on this trip, went in a mokoro wearing a life jacket and his own guide. He was treated as precious cargo. The rest of the luggage, camp equipment, and supplies went in extra mokoros, which I must say made us feel like something special was on the way. The mokoros navigate along the paths used by the hippos at night, making for some lovely scenery and tight turns. It took about an hour to get to the camp, which

was set up in a clearing under the shade of some trees about 50 metres from the water itself.

We were extremely impressed with the camp; there were dome tents – each with their own washbasin. There was a bucket shower and a pit toilet, a kitchen area with a fire to cook on, and a lovely long table with chairs for meals and relaxing around.

Each day we woke just before dawn to see the sunrise and then did a long nature walk, often past wild animals. We got quite close to many animals but our guides always kept us at a safe distance, and once we had watched for a while we would move on and leave the animals in peace.

We returned to camp for brunch and a lazy day

relaxing, playing cards, having mokoro poling lessons, or swimming in one of the hippo paths away from the bigger hippo pools. The Botswanan guides quickly learned to play Uno and were beating us after a few rounds.

On the last evening, we took a mokoro trip to see the hippos and then watched the sunset; one of the most beautiful sunsets I have ever seen.

That night we had a fantastic meal, prepared by Betty the chef, and the guides made sure we had a great time by singing and dancing around a roaring fire, an evening the kids still talk about. The next day we watched the sunrise and then, after breakfast, packed our bags reluctantly, not wanting to leave. We returned in mokoros to the

boat station to meet our transfer back to Maun.

When we returned, I was quite nervous about the fridge, which had been in a closed caravan for two days with solar panels getting shade for large parts of the day. I needn't have worried, as the fridge was still running perfectly and although the solar panels had not quite generated enough power for the draw, it was enough for the batteries to be sufficiently

charged. The Conqueror, on the other hand, had somehow lost connection to mains power and the fridge had turned off completely.

Day 13, 14 & 15:

The long road home

We started the trip back home, which was broken into three travel days, the first night at Planet Baobab in chalets with dinner included. This made for a relaxed afternoon and evening.

The next day we headed to Woodlands Stopover in Francistown, where we shared three chalets between all of us and had a lovely braai.

The last day we drove from Francistown, via the Stockpoort border, all the way back to Durban, a long day indeed. In hindsight, we should have headed back to Matamba from Planet Baobab, which would have made the trip back to Durban a bit easier.

A wrap

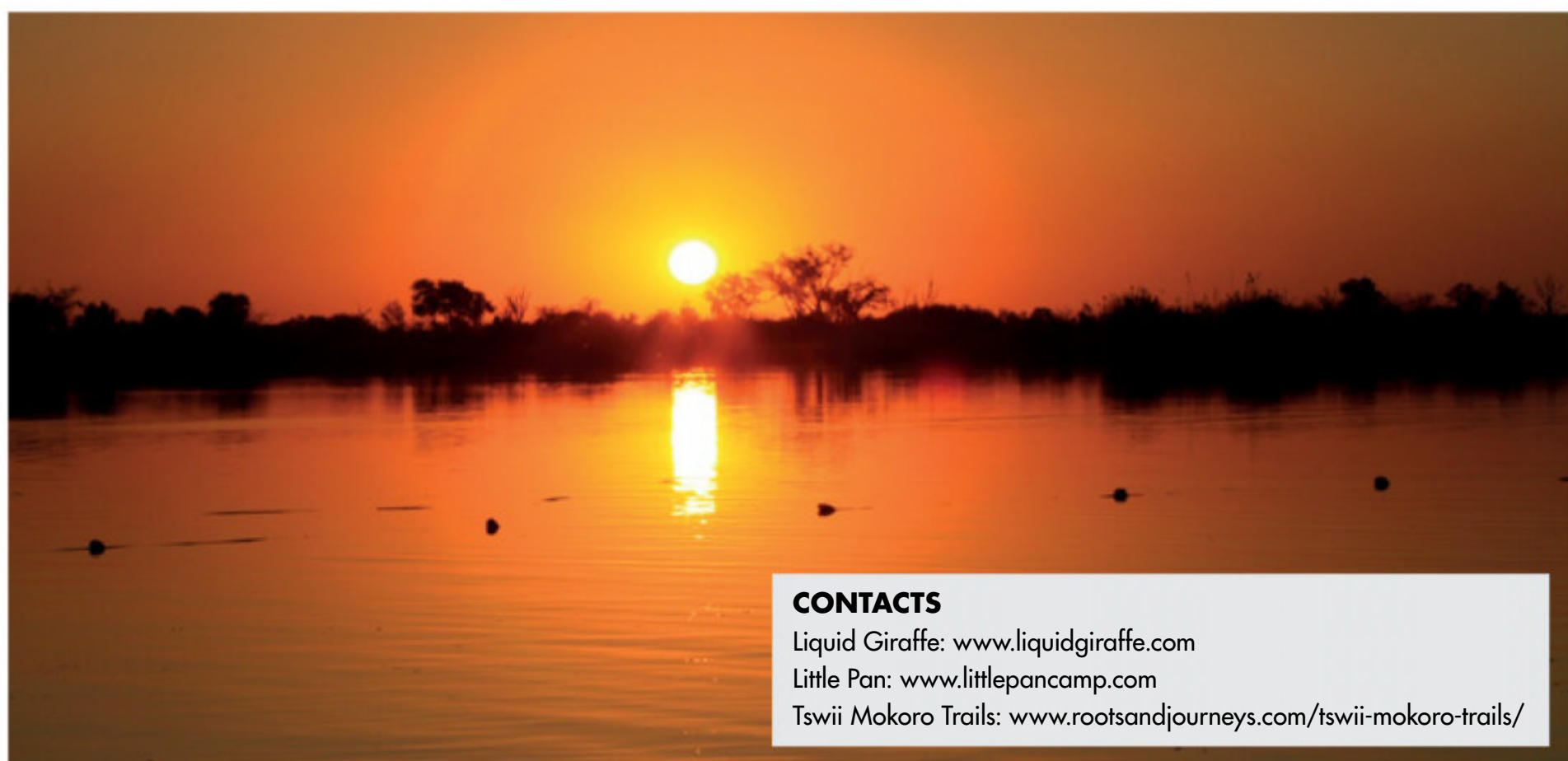
As a holiday destination, Botswana is fantastic with probably some of the most stunning campsites you will ever go to. We never put out the groundsheet or the awning on the caravan, as there was no need to and the evenings in July are mild enough to enjoy around a fire with no more protection than a warm top.

The SunPower solar panels were the star of the show. They performed amazingly well powering two caravans for over a week, which pretty much means we can now choose any off-grid campsite and be self-sufficient for as long as we need.

The portable electric fence we borrowed from Bruce was also a hit, as it helps with peace of mind, especially with small kids around, enabling the adults to relax in the evenings. Lastly, using Glen and team helped a lot, as we pretty much had the prime campsites at each stop and, logistically, it could not have been simpler. ●



Above left The panels had generated 200Wh and 280Wh on the days it was parked – enough to keep the batteries at 12.4V. This was a great job considering how much sun the panels actually got. **Above right** Our Fridge was happily running at -7 degrees when we returned from the 2-day mokoro trip. **Below** The sunset in the Okavango Delta, taken from a Mokoro, is very special indeed.



CONTACTS

Liquid Giraffe: www.liquidgiraffe.com

Little Pan: www.littlepancamp.com

Tswii Mokoro Trails: www.rootsandjourneys.com/tswii-mokoro-trails/

SPRING LOADED

Tough Dog air assist springs installation

By **Andrew Middleton**

Air helper springs are an often misused and misunderstood addition to a 4x4's suspension system. Consisting of an extremely strong rubber air bag and bracketry, air helper springs are fitted to a standard vehicle's rear leaf or coil springs to help the stock setup carry extra weight without upgrading the coils or leaf springs.

With that in mind, we took our long-term Isuzu D-Max to Opposite Lock in Wellington to have a set of Tough Dog air assist springs fitted.

When looking into installing a set of air assist springs, it's important to realise that they are not designed to replace the need for an aftermarket suspension system if your vehicle is consistently heavily loaded. Air assist springs are primarily designed to keep a vehicle level while towing or carrying the occasional load, while also improving stability and reducing stress on your rear coil or leaf springs.

The beauty of air assist springs is that they can be adjusted to deal with

different loads. As loads increase, air is added, and when the vehicle is empty, air is let out, so the ride is not overly firm.

During a recent trip to Malawi, our heavily-loaded Hilux relied on its air helper springs to keep it from bottoming out in the harshest terrain. With over 800kg loaded, the air assist system proved an invaluable accessory to our trip that would otherwise have required an entirely upgraded rear suspension – an expensive solution for just one trip.

Our Isuzu install

During our tenure with our long-term Isuzu, it's been driven by a variety of different people over a variety of terrain. It is used for everything from 4x4 trails, to overland expeditions, to pulling heavy caravans, and simply going to the shops empty. For this reason, air helpers are perfect for our application due to the varied loads it is tasked with carrying.

Tough Dog air bags are made from polyurethane and are designed to withstand up to 4-bar pressure, but as we've found in the past, even with almost one ton of load, no more than 1.2-bar is needed to level the vehicle. It is recommended that a minimum of 0.3-bar is kept inside each air bag.

The kit for a leaf-sprung vehicle comprises the air bag that is attached to a base plate and a similar steel plate on the top, which bolt to their respective brackets on the chassis and on the top of the leaf spring pack. The fit and finish of the laser-cut, powder-coated brackets is superb.

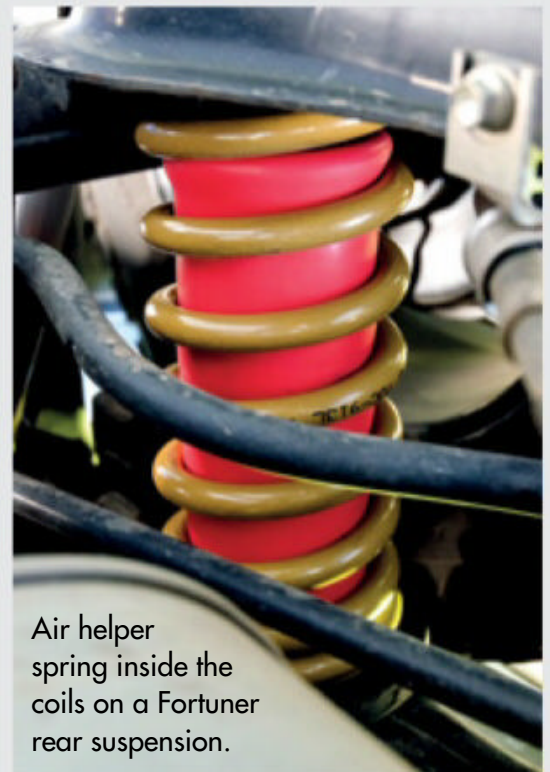
Fitment at Opposite Lock in Wellington took just two-and-a-half hours and included fabricating a custom bracket to take the two air hose outlets, which enable each air bag to be separately inflated. Standard tyre valves are used, making it quick and easy to inflate, deflate or simply check the pressure in each air bag.

The Tough Dog leaf spring kit costs R11 295 (excluding fitment) from Opposite Lock. Peace of mind comes from a 3-year unlimited-kilometre warranty. For coil spring applications, an air bag can be fitted within the coil itself, making Tough Dog air helper springs suitable for most applications. ●

For more info visit
www.oppositelock.co.za



The Tough Dog air helper kit all laid out ready for fitment. The kit comprises the air springs, mounting brackets, bolts, and the supplied piping with valves to control their pressure.



Air helper spring inside the coils on a Fortuner rear suspension.

FITMENT WITH COIL SPRINGS?

Air helper springs from Tough Dog are also available for coil-sprung vehicles, which are also prone to sagging under a heavy load.

In the case of this Fortuner, they are fitted inside the spring and are cheaper, since no bracketry is required. A set will cost R4 795.

Most vehicles with independent front suspension employ a 'coil over' spring design, meaning the shock absorber resides inside the spring. For this reason, it's not possible to fit air helper springs to this type of front suspension and an upgraded spring is recommended when fitting heavy accessories, such as bull bar or winch.



The rubber bump stop, used to prevent the leaf pack from hitting the chassis under extreme compression, is removed and its function is replaced with the air helper springs.



The top bracket wraps around the chassis member and takes the entire additional load that the air helper spring is expected to support.



Stock U-bolts for the leaf springs are loosened so that the base bracket for the air helper spring can be secured on them, along with the air spring itself. The chassis bracket and metal top plate of the air helper springs are then bolted together. The air spring now moves as the leaf springs move.



We had a small plate made up to fit behind the tow ball for easy access to the valves, to fill or deflate the air springs. This plate was necessary because we did not want to drill into the standard bumper.



A technician measures the vehicle on both sides to see that, with the spring fitted, the height matches OEM standards. Setting the vehicle to its standard height provides the best comfort and should be achieved no matter what the load is.

RICHTERSVELD FISH RIVER CANYON ADVENTURE

BASICS

Venue: Richtersveld National Park, Ai-Ais (Namibia)

Date: 9-17 May, 2020

Cost: R11 000 per person

Includes: Accommodation & Park fees, Dinner daily

Excludes: Fuel, Border costs, Drinks, VHF radio hire

DETAILS

The Richtersveld is a mountainous desert landscape characterised by rugged kloofs and high mountains, situated in the north-western corner of South Africa's Northern Cape Province. It is full of changing scenery from flat, sandy, coastal plains, to craggy sharp mountains of volcanic rock, and the lushness of the Orange River, which forms the border with neighbouring Namibia. The area ranges in altitude from sea level to 1 377m (4 518ft) at Cornellberg.

Located in South Africa's northern Namaqualand, this arid area represents a harsh landscape where water is a great scarcity and only the hardiest of lifeforms survive. Despite this, the Richtersveld is regarded as the only Arid Biodiversity Hotspot on earth, with an astonishing variety of plant, bird, and animal life (much of which is endemic).

Part of the area is inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List due to its cultural values but remains a favourite amongst nature travellers. The landscape is sometimes described as 'martian'. Though barren and desolate at first glance, closer examination reveals the area to be rich in desert life-forms, with an array of unique species specially adapted for survival.

The Fish River Canyon is the second largest canyon in the world and the largest in Africa, as well as the second most visited tourist attraction in Namibia. It features a gigantic ravine of about 160km long, up to 27km wide, and in places almost 550m deep.

The Fish River is the longest interior river in Namibia. It cuts deep into the plateau, which is today dry, stony, and sparsely covered with hardy drought-resistant plants. The river flows intermittently, usually flooding in late summer; the rest of the year it becomes a chain of long narrow pools. The hot springs resort of Ai-Ais is situated at the lower end of the Fish River Canyon.



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JEEP *vs* LAND ROVER



Words & pictures **Andrew Middleton**



The argument as to whether Jeep or Land Rover is the better vehicle can be traced back to the early 1950s when the Land Rover Series 1 emerged as a British interpretation of the WW2 Willys Jeep.

Both brands are iconic in their own right and today each of the marques produces some of the most high-tech and capable 4x4s on the market.

But which nameplate produces the most capable vehicles? It's the kind of question that can only be answered outside in the field.

The scene for the most recent brand skirmish saw 40 vehicles from each camp descending on Honinklip Farm near Bot River, on an extremely windy Saturday with dust and grit nearly sandblasting the paint off the vehicles. Despite this, spirits remained extremely high and 10 heavily-modified vehicles, representing each manufacturer, entered the ring.

Points system

Unlike other technical 4x4 events, the Jeep vs Land Rover challenge worked on a group points system. Individual vehicles started with 100 points each, with deductions depending on performance, and a total score for either Jeep or Land Rover was counted to find an overall winner.

To keep it fair, five obstacles were built by the Jeep guys and five by the Landy fanatics, just to make sure that no advantage was given to either manufacturer.

With 30 points deducted for a roll-back and 20 for hitting a pole, points were easily lost in extremely technical challenges that favoured short wheelbase vehicles with decent stability.

All vehicles had to be road-legal, though the variety of modifications varied widely, with most vehicles sporting two lockable axles.

This page

Morne du Preez tackles one of the final and most difficult obstacles in his Disco.

Opposite page

Masses of fun was had by all, despite gale force winds.

Honingklip breweries came to the party with their own craft beer for those who weren't driving.





JOIN UP

To get info about the event, and upcoming events, please join the Western Cape 4x4 & Difflock Facebook group as well as the Jeep vs Land Rover Facebook group.



Next year's event promises to be even bigger and better, despite this being the highlight of my year as far as events go. Judging by the happy faces of competitors, it's the highlight of theirs too.

Jeep
IF YOU GET STUCK
I WILL TOW YOU OUT

HONK IF ANY
BEER FALLS OUT



Throughout the day a few vehicles were knocked out due to mechanical issues, and several scored zero points in certain obstacles due to getting stuck.

Despite this, after seven obstacles, no safe bets on a winner were possible and tensions between the brand fanatics had reached fever pitch. The final obstacle – a time trail through the Honingklip dam – separated the men from the boys.

Final tally

In the end, Land Rover won the event with 1947 points, having used an assortment of Disco 1s and modified Defenders.

The Jeep guys only managed 1467 points, primarily using Cherokee XJs, modified TJJs, and a couple of more modern Wranglers.

After a tough day, a blast was had by all. The score was accepted and both victors and losers were able to put their differences aside in the name of sportsmanship. Until next year's event, when there will be another battle of honour... ●



WITH THANKS TO...

William Simpson Jeep was the sole monetary sponsor of the event and helped provide prizes and organisation costs. Without sponsors, these brilliant events would not be impossible. Please visit www.williamsimpsonfca.co.za for great offers on new and used Jeep products.

Thanks also go to Denille de Kock and Henry Kasner for organising a brilliant event, Honingklip 4x4 Farm for hosting, and Western Cape 4x4 & Difflock Facebook group for helping to promote the challenge.



A blue Toyota Land Cruiser 4x4 is shown from a front-three-quarter view, driving on a steep, rocky hillside. The vehicle is equipped with a black bull bar, auxiliary lights, and a roof rack. The terrain is rugged with large, flat rock slabs and loose gravel. The background shows a steep, rocky slope with some sparse vegetation.

RAD RIG

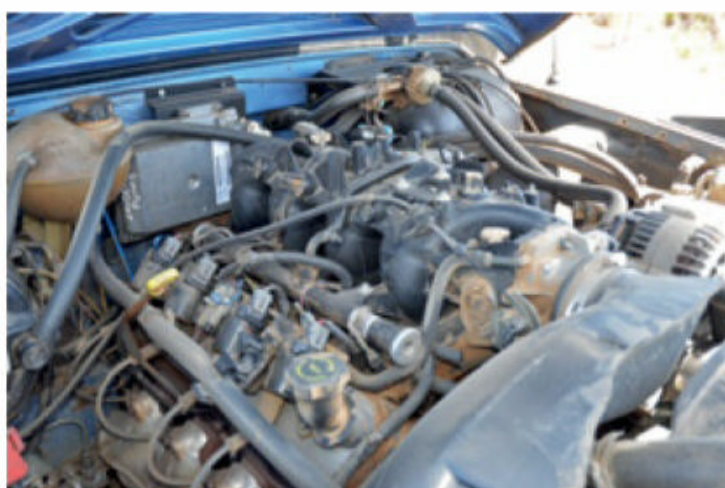
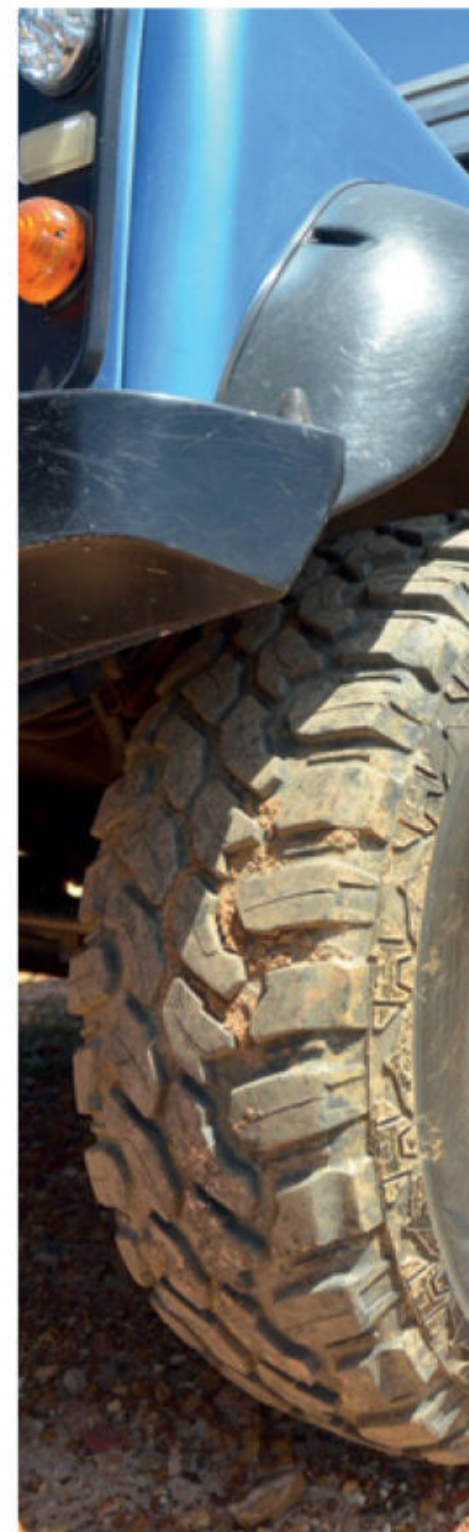
NO PRETTE

Words & pictures **Andrew Middleton**
Additional images **Hein Burnett**



DEFENDER

HEIN BURNETT'S DEFENDER IS A PROJECT WITH NO END



It's a known fact that for most owners, their Land Rover Defender is a project that's never finished. There is always something more to add, or some aspect to improve to make it even more unique. Just ask Hein Burnett, owner of the well-known Cape-based 4x4 accessory manufacturer Burnco.

Six years ago he splashed out on the purchase of a 1989 3.9-litre V8 long wheelbase Hardtop, and since then has spent many a spare moment turning it into the ultimate overlander.

It's used on extended camping trips with his wife Zelda, and every aspect is crafted to make the vehicle self-sufficient – and powerful – to ensure their trips are a breeze and they can tackle whatever comes their way.

To start with, Hein had a few criteria for the ideal 4x4 starting point. It had to be manual, it had to have a petrol engine (preferably a V8), and it must have solid axles.

As standard the Hardtop ticked these boxes, so what more was there to do? Plenty,

apparently, as Hein was quick to haul out the old Rover 3.9 and bolt in one of GM's potent LM7 small-block 5.3-litre V8s, sourced from a Chevy pick-up. With a more adequate 202kW on tap, Hein went searching further down the driveline for improvements.

The front axle was replaced with a beam from a Disco 2, as unlike on Defenders or Disco 1s, the Disco 2 front axle features exposed CV joints as opposed to Birfield joints, making field repairs easier. While he was at it, the rear axle, transfer case, and gearbox from the donor Disco 2 were swapped in.

Keeping the power on the ground was the next priority, with the Defender getting fitted with Terra Firma suspension components, a set of air lockers, and beefy 35-inch 12.5 x R15 tyres.

A removable warn winch came next; its particular party trick being the ability to mount it on the front or the rear of the Landy – useful when on solo trips into the wilds. This winch fits snugly in a box on the side of the vehicle.

Top left

The Richtersveld is one of this Rover's favourite stomping grounds.

Above left

Everything is custom on this Landy, including the badges.

Above right

Despite coming with a V8 originally, a much more powerful GM sourced LM7 V8 replaced the Rover unit.



Top right

Used as an overlander, Hein's Defender never stops exploring.

Right

Custom Burnco bullbar with a set of Hella spots looks the part and walks the talk.



For inflating and deflating tyres as well as locking the diffs, two ARB compressors, and associated 20-litre air tanks were installed. Other external accessories include LED lights, KC Spots, projector headlamps, two extra fuel tanks, two water tanks, and Burnco's rock sliders and bumpers.

Though this is an impressive list of accessories, we're not even getting started yet on what makes this Defender the ultimate camper. The most obvious feature here is the pop-up roof, which was designed and built by Hein. After the roof is raised (by remote) using pulleys and small winches mounted inside the vehicle, a bed can be folded down and easily accessed from inside the rear of the vehicle. Having access to your cab when camping offers huge security benefits and peace of mind, as well as easy access to beer from one of the two installed fridges.

A gas geyser and inside washbasin (with running hot/cold water) is linked to an outside shower, which unfolds and folds back in a

matter of seconds. Of course, a full kitchen unit has been installed – complete with a spice rack and fold-out tables.

Other comfort features include two electric blankets in the roof for cold nights, powered off a dual-battery system with the inverter charged by a pair of solar panels mounted on the roof.

Perhaps the most notable interior modification is the new Puma dash, in which all the gauges work despite being linked to the Chevy Vortex V8. A Sony sound system and both 29MHz Radio and VHF Radio keep Hein in touch with the world while out camping.

Hein admits this vehicle will always be an uncompleted project, and that it gets a little extra each time he plans another of his trips to Namibia or the Richtersveld. Amazingly, everything was designed and built by Hein himself, bar roping in a few extra hands for the wiring.

Last but not least, this has to be the best-sounding Defender to ever come burbling past when you're out in the desert. ●

Below left

A gas geyser connects to a tap for the shower and even a sink for washing up.

Below right

The shower unravels effortlessly.

Bottom left

Notice the Puma dash on a late Eighties Defender: and yes, everything works.

Bottom right

The exposed CV joints on the transplanted Discovery 2 axle makes for easier repair in the field.

Visit

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beating and 4x4
manufacturing needs.**



Top right

Raising or lowering the roof is as simple as pressing a button on a remote control, as it lifts on a small electric winch.

Below left

Storage space is built into custom-made gullwings on the side.

Below right

Various radios connect to a variety of frequencies.

Bottom

The kitchen unit is built onto the back of the rear door.





HOME RUN

FORD EVEREST 2.0 BI TURBO XLT 10AT 4X4

Does an extra four gears and two turbos make up for a lack in capacity? We hit Kroonland to find out.

Words **Andrew Middleton** Pictures **Andrew Middleton & Jacques Viljoen**

Having tested the Ford Everest in 2.2-litre manual form back in January 2017, we came back wholly disappointed. The engine produced almost no power unless valves were dancing on the bonnet. The extreme turbo lag meant that pulling away from traffic lights

smoothly was difficult and a light flywheel resulted in a vehicle that was easy to stall off-road and frustrating to drive. Unfortunately, during our testing the traction control system on that vehicle, which allows you to input current terrain, also went into limp mode – overall then, it wasn't completely sorted.

Despite its shortfalls in the powertrain and electronics department, the Everest's interior was, and still is, best in class. What's more, thanks to the Watts link rear-end, it handled better on-road than its competitors too.

So here we are two years later, to test the most recent offering with the new 2.0-litre bi-turbo engine, 10-speed



automatic gearbox, and an updated traction control system. Ford may have just struck gold.

Admittedly, our current XLT test vehicle is a near top-of-the-range model, boasting a very impressive 157kW but just like every other highly-boosted small capacity diesel it will suffer from turbo lag, and that's where that ingenious gearbox comes in. With 10 speeds to choose from and an extremely widespread of ratios, the box has the ability to keep an engine with a narrow power band on the boil at all times. The result is both decent performance and

improved fuel consumption, with our test runs consistently turning in around 9.0-9.3 litres/100km.

We also found that, due to first gear being so short, many off-road situations that would normally require low-range can be done in high, though for extreme scenarios low range is still available at the touch of a button.

Our test route involved extremely steep climbs on a loose, rocky surface at Kroonland 4x4 trail. The loose, steep, and rocky surface was a perfect test for the updated traction control system,

which despite being worked very hard never gave up as the previous generation did.

By parking the vehicle on a loose axle twister up a steep incline, engaging rock mode and four-wheel drive with the diff-lock disengaged, the Everest needed about 1 800rpm for the system to activate. In situations like switchbacks where traction is an issue, the TC system worked effectively enough to negate the use of the rear locker. However, when it comes to more extreme climbs, the locker was still



SPECIFICATIONS

EVEREST 2.0 BI-TURBO XLT 10AT 4x4

Price	R701 500
Engine	2.0-litre bi-turbo diesel 157kW/500Nm
Consumption	7.6l/100km (claimed)
Transmission	10-speed viscous automatic
4WD Sytem	Part-time with traction control and rear diff-lock
Payload	713kg
GVM	3 100kg
Tare	2 318kg
Towing (braked)	3 100kg
Ground clearance (mm)	225
Dimensions (mm)	4 892/1 860/1 837/2 850
Warranty	4 years/120 000km
Service intervals	15 000km

necessary to reduce wheelspin. It is something you want to have in the off-road armoury.

Though the traction control system is effective, the Everest only offers 'average at best' wheel articulation. It scored 393 points on our RTI ramp, a rating behind that of the Toyota Fortuner and Isuzu Mu-X.

As in all engineering problems, everything is a compromise, and while the Everest may not have the best suspension flex around, it does offer the best on-road drive in its class by a decent margin. This is thanks to a very sophisticated and well-sorted rear suspension system with new spring rates and improved anti-roll bars. The Watts Link rear-end is the same you'll get on the new Ranger Raptor and it helps reduce body roll without

increasing spring rates, which effectively means the Everest still offers superb ride quality both over small high-frequency bumps and on big hits.

As before, the Everest's interior boasts some best-in-class features including the Sync 3 infotainment system. Compared to some rivals this system is simply years ahead. Including Apple Car Play and Android auto, the ability to sync a phone and play music is relatively effortless, intuitive, and powerful. We also applaud the option of Tracks4Africa on the Navigation system too. If we had one gripe, it was that the graphics and 'look and feel' of the interface are stuck in 2010, as one commentator would have it.

Seven leather-clad seats are

extremely plush, as you'd expect from an American brand, and the rear seats fold completely flat – offering a cave-like load space. The third row is also useable, though our six-foot tester said he wouldn't want to be back there for too long.

The new 2.0-litre bi-turbo engine and multi-ratio gearbox is a clear improvement over both the old 2.2-litre and 3.2-litre turbodiesel options, adding to a package that offers high-tech features such as 4x4 terrain response, a superb interior, and a comfortable ride on- and off-road. We found the new-spec XLT model to offer a sweet spot in the range in terms of performance and features for price, though if you are still of the opinion that displacement is king, the 3.2 remains an option in the range. ●





Eugene Stetson

Eugene's Jeep getting twisted at Tierkloof 4x4. His wrangler 3.8 features a Ripp supercharger, Rock Krawler suspension kit with 5-inch lift, Falcon fully adjustable shocks, Dirty Life beadlock rims, and 37-inch Cooper STT Pro mud terrains. It is also fitted with a Warn winch and Rockshockerz front and rear bumpers.



Henk Bekker

Henk's military-looking Pajero Sport 3.2D is fitted with self-built front and rear bumpers, rocksliders, and bashplates. It has a Warn XD9000i winch, Summit snorkel, TRE rear airlocker, 2-inch lift kit, and a self-built 76mm exhaust with a catalytic converter and EGR delete. The photo was taken just outside Beaufort West.



Jan van Gerve

Jan makes sure there is enough firewood for an entire week on their trip to Klein Letaba River in Limpopo. His Fortuner 3.0 D-4D has a 50mm Amada Xtreme suspension kit, UHF and VHF radios, TJM front bumper, and a 12 000lb Runva winch. It also features Frontrunner rocksliders and roofrack, and is riding on BF Goodrich KM3 muds.

Pedre Havenga

Enjoying a beautiful sunset in the Atlantis Dunes, Pedro's Jeep Wrangler 3.8 has Fox Racing Shocks with BDS Coils and 33-inch Cooper STT Max tyres.



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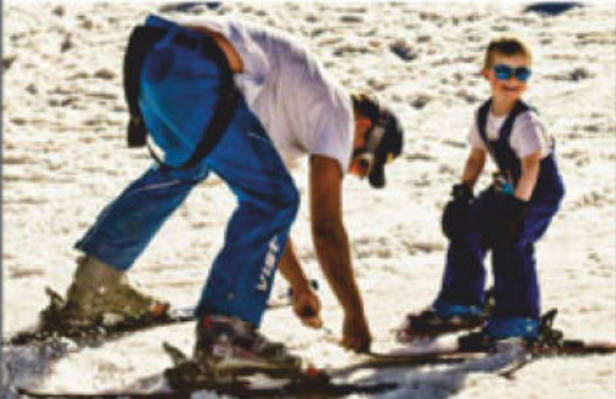


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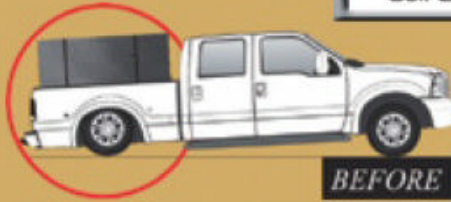
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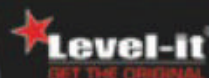
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TO SELL OR NOT TO SELL

Which mid-sized sport utility vehicles have the best resale value? The answer, according to Darryl Jacobson managing director of True Price, is the Audi Q5 – but only just! “It beat the Mercedes-Benz GLC by a fraction; there’s hardly anything in it,” he reveals.

His findings are based on an analysis of True Price data. To provide motorists with realistic (and free) vehicle evaluations, the True Price team attends hundreds of bank repossession auctions each year. They document all prices paid on auction, so the True Price database contains the actual prices paid on thousands of individual vehicle auctions.

The Q5 achieved 70.68%, a very good score. “Personally, I love its looks. When I observe auctions, I see that it appeals to private buyers – especially younger and more affluent motorists,” he notes. The Mercedes-Benz – with a score of 70.65% – is also a great buy. According to Jacobson, it always



attracts a great deal of attention on auction. “It remains a status symbol for buyers and it has universal appeal. The engine is impressive, as is the amount of interior space.”

The third place on the list of SUVs with the best resale value goes to

the BMW X3. “It is very popular with the mom’s soccer team lift club; buyers like the fact that it is large and spacious but not too large to manoeuvre around town. It’s especially appealing to buyers when the Motor Plan is still intact.”

CARS & COFFEE

Ford Motor Company and McDonald’s USA will soon be giving vehicles a caffeine boost by using part of a familiar staple in the morning routine, coffee beans, in vehicle parts such as headlamp housings.

Every year, millions of pounds of coffee chaff – the dried skin of the bean – naturally comes off during the roasting process. Together, Ford and McDonald’s can provide an innovative new home to a significant portion of that material. The companies found that chaff can be converted into a durable material to reinforce certain vehicle parts. By heating the chaff to high temperatures under low oxygen, mixing it with plastic and other additives, and turning it into pellets, the

material can be formed into various shapes.

The collaboration with Ford and McDonald’s is the latest example of the innovative approaches both companies take to product and environmental stewardship. The project also involves Varroc Lighting Systems, which supplies the headlamps, and Competitive Green Technologies, the processor of the coffee chaff.



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AWARD WINNING

The Volvo XC90 was the winner in the Large Luxury SUV category at the recent Gumtree Auto Pre-Owned Car Awards.

A total of 20 automobile brands were nominated across 12 categories. The Volvo XC90 won the best large luxury SUV under R700 000 category.

Charmagne Mavudzi, head of marketing and communications at Volvo Cars South Africa, notes that this is the latest in a long line of accolades for Volvo's flagship model, the XC90.

"We are very grateful for the Gumtree

Award, which confirms what our customers are telling us. They love the XC90's award-winning exterior design, class-leading active and passive safety features, and luxurious interior (which, of course, takes its inspiration from the country of Volvo's birth, Sweden). They have also commented favourably on the tablet-style touchscreen that removes any clutter from the dashboard, the vehicle's powerful yet efficient powertrains, and the advanced connectivity of the XC90. Clearly, the Gumtree judges agree!" she concludes.



MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Tiger Wheel & Tyre has announced that its Durban CBD store has moved within the CBD, to shiny new premises at 91 Florence Nzama Street, previously known as Prince Alfred Street.

The new fitment centre boasts a well-stocked showroom where you can browse a wide range of wheels and tyres from the world's most reputable brands, as well as a selection of handpicked automotive accessories. When you're done shopping and while trained technicians work on your vehicle, in one of the four fitment or two-wheel alignment bays, you'll be invited to enjoy a cup of tea or coffee and catch up on the day's news in the comfortable waiting lounge.

MADE IN SA

As one of its major milestones for 2019, Continental Tyre South Africa is now proudly producing its first 19-inch tyre at its Port Elizabeth manufacturing plant – making this the first-ever 19-inch tyre produced on South African soil.

Previously the Continental Tyre plant had the capacity to manufacture up to 18-inch tyre sizes, with the launch of the 19-inch General Grabber AT3 all-terrain tyre representing a significant achievement for the domestic operations.

"Local production of the first-ever 19-inch tyre in the Port Elizabeth plant opens the door for our further expansion in the crucial replacement tyre business, and prepares Continental Tyre for new opportunities



in the 19-inch original equipment business," says Shaun Uys, MD of Continental Tyre SA.

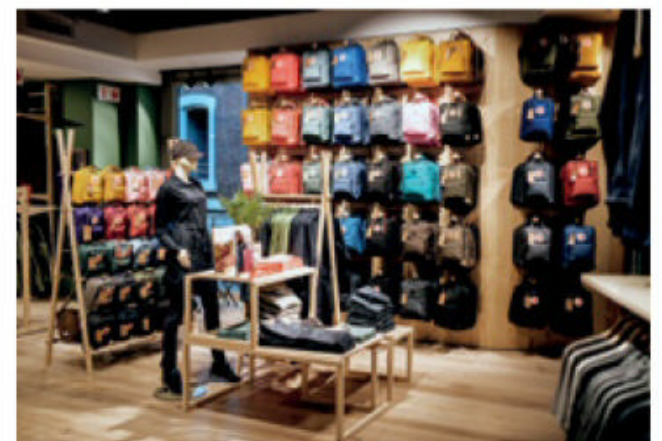
Following the extensive global and local approval processes, the ordering and introduction of the necessary tooling for stock preparation, tyre building, and final finish followed. The first experimental tyre was built in early 2019, and mainstream production of the new 255/55 R19 Grabber AT3 commenced in the second quarter, with volumes steadily increasing to satisfy the growing customer demand.

SWEDISH INVASION

Fjällräven, the Swedish heritage outdoor brand known for producing high-quality outerwear, apparel, and gear since 1960, is launching in South Africa with a new flagship store at the Victoria and Alfred (V&A) Waterfront in Cape Town.

"We are excited to inspire South Africans to enjoy the outdoors with

our premium and quality outdoor wear and gear," says Davide Locatelli Rossi, Fjällräven South African spokesperson. "Fjällräven is not about being the first or fastest, but rather about creating durable, timeless clothing and equipment that lasts for generations and allows everyone to enjoy nature at their own pace, which is what we believe will translate to South African users."



SNOW PATROL

Fjällräven is inviting ordinary South Africans who have a love for adventure and believe they have what it takes to trek 300km of Scandinavian Arctic wilderness on a dogsled to apply for the Fjällräven Polar 2020.

Successful applicants will embark on an adventure of a lifetime through 300km of Arctic wilderness. They will meet more than 200 highly-skilled sled dogs, a handful of expert guides, and a group of ordinary people from all over the world to journey from Signaldalen in Norway to Jukkasjärvi in Sweden on a dogsled. Fjällräven will pay all expenses for the trip and provide professional equipment to keep everybody safe in the Arctic conditions.

The event takes place from 30 March to 5 April 2020.



ZAMBEZI-CONGO, EAST-WEST

The Kingsley Holgate Expedition team has just finished their latest and toughest expedition to date.

The recently completed Zambezi-Congo Expedition began in Chinde, Mozambique in the vast, 18 000-square kilometre Zambezi Delta where, as tradition dictates, the Holgate expedition team filled their symbolic Zulu calabash with Indian Ocean seawater from the mouth of the Zambezi River.

Averaging sometimes only around 50km a day, the team fought its way over 2 500km in low ratio negotiating three-metre-deep mud ruts, trenches, powder-soft sand, and treacherous potholes to cover more than 10 000km of some the worst conditions the team has conquered yet.

After nearly eight weeks, the two Land Rover Discoverys rolled into the port town of Banana and the symbolic calabash of water from the mouth of the Zambezi was emptied into the Congo River.

As is the case with all their expeditions, the team carried a Scroll of Peace and Goodwill and collected hundreds of messages of support from health workers, chiefs, ambassadors, and residents along the route.

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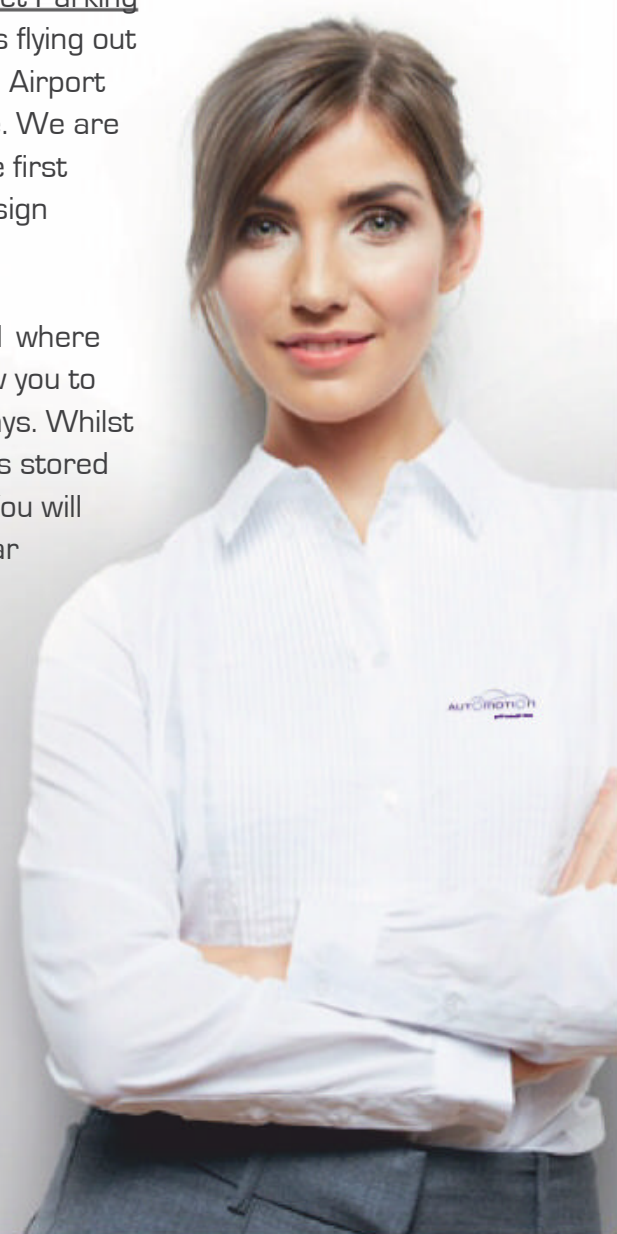
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ALEX BRAKHOVEN

2010 Suzuki Grand Vitara 3.2 V6 Auto

Occupation:

Pensioner (well-earned) and a member of the Suzuki 4x4 GP Club.

Modifications:

Monty's Wizerd lift kit, Wizerd Steel underwear, 16-inch A-Line wheels with 235/70 R16 Bridgestone Dueler A/T tyres, Frontrunner roof rack, Ironman 4x4 500-litre rooftop waterproof storage bag (poor man's Thule?) bonnet protector, and basic recovery stuff.

Future mods:

You don't need much on this one; it's really good! Seen a stunning front bumper in Oz though. Could take the rear seats out and go moggy on a camper build, perhaps 'chip' motor and add more gears to the auto box (5th is too long), 'chipping' the motor, more gears in the 'box. Other options are a proper 2-way radio, recovery points, rock sliders, dual battery/solar system, and HUD navigation.

Dream car:

The next proper V6-powered Grand Vitara, or a G-Wagen.

Most memorable trip:

Pondoland Wild Coast tour in October 2017 with Andre van Vuuren. Highlights



Alex and his Suzuki GV in its natural habitat – the Kagga Kamma reserve.

included the mother of all storms, with rain blowing horizontally, during which we did a recovery of an overturned overlander Navara. Then there was the suicidal Jeep Renegade barrelling down Poenskop in Port St. Johns, a few incidents with some getting stuck in the mud, a fantastic hike to Waterfall Bluff, and the most 'lekker' crowd we've travelled with in years.

Planned trips:

Witsand, Augrabies, Twee Rivieren, Mata-Mata, Nossob & back. Also, depending on finances, I'd like to include coastal Namibia and Mozambique (Macaneta/Xai-Xai).

I never leave home without:

My wife, a good book or two, and the compressor. ●

Submit your photo & WIN a Fredlin hoist

There's no point in driving around with your roof rack/ rooftop tent if you're not on holiday. Save fuel (and wear & tear) by installing a Fredlin hoist. This proudly South African product solves the problem of where to store your roof rack/ rooftop tent, canopy, or even a sports car hardtop: up and out of the way! The Fredlin hoist fastens securely to your garage roof or carport, is easily installed and can be operated by one person.

TO ENTER

One Fredlin hoist will be given away every month to the lucky reader featured in Me & My 4x4. Simply send a photograph – 1MB or larger – and the answers to the categories shown above, to editor@sa4x4.co.za. Vehicle and

driver must be featured together in an off-road setting. (No driveway shots, please.)

COMPETITION RULES

The decision as to which entries are featured rests solely with SA4x4; no correspondence will be entered into on this issue. Should Fredlin retract their sponsorship, SA4x4 reserves the right to publish any entries received without awarding any prize.

CONTACT FREDLIN

For more information on the Fredlin hoist, go to www.fredlin.co.za or contact Freddie Badenhorst on 082 553 0555, 012 661 8939 or sales@fredlin.co.za.



WIN!

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